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CONTENTS

Features

28

ECLECTIC ELEKTRA

MILLER AND SIENKIEWICZ'S
TRAILBLAZING NEW EPIC SERIES
by PETER SANDERSON

48

SERGIO ARAGONES

A GROO-SOME INTERVIEW
by PETER BOSCH

55

ECLIPSE'S WORLD

HOW IT WORKS, AND WHY
by JOHN LUSTIG

64

EXPECT A MIRACLE

BEHIND THE SCENES OF UPSHOT
GRAPHICS' MIRACLE SQUAD
by JAMES VANCE

Depts.

8

EDITORIAL

10

PERSPECTIVE

LOOKALIKE ARTISTS
by DENNIS PIMPLE

12

2 PG. SPREAD

A CHAT WITH STEVE RUDE, PLUS
MINI-REVIEWS BY JAN STRNAD

15

NEWSLINE

20

SILLY COVER

REALITY IS SOMETIMES FUNNIER

21

COMING DISTRACTIONS

42

FIRSTLOOK

A STEVE DITKO STRIP FROM
RENEGADE'S NEW COMIC:
MURDER

71

COMICS IN REVIEW

MAN OF STEEL, MIAMI MICE,
CAPTAIN CONFEDERACY, AND
OTHERS. PLUS ALAN MOORE'S
FAREWELL TO THE OLD SUPER-
MAN

81

AMAZING READERS



OUR COVER: BILL SIENKIEWICZ has provided a stunning vision of Elektra, the beautiful psychotic heroine of the Epic Comics series *Elektra Assassin*. Elektra is © 1986 Marvel Comics Group

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DAVID SMAY EDITORIAL

Gary Groth got off the phone snickering. This is not a good sign. Gary snickers when puppies are squashed under dumptrucks. "Spiegelman hates it," he said. "He thinks it's Fascistic." "What?" said I, all innocent like. "Dark Knight," quoth Groth, snickering again just for effect. At this point Gary and I got into a (civil) argument over the artist's moral responsibility to his audience.

I argued that it was a dangerous idea to censure art on moral grounds. Gary's point was that, of course we could judge a work if it was morally reprehensible. In fact, we would be remiss if we did not speak out against a work that was racist or sexist or anti-semitic or whatever. I believe that the artist's first responsibility lies with his work. He has to be true to his vision or he will create nothing worth arguing about in the first place. In a free society an artist's responsibility is to be original, distinctive and challenging. By my definition an artist is only immoral when he's not pissing Art Spiegelman or Gary Groth off. Or whoever the arbiters of taste are this season. Of course, moral criticism of a work isn't the same as censorship. But on the other hand I've never seen an argument for censorship that didn't claim the moral highground. I really don't trust people who want to tell me what I should or shouldn't be reading.

But I don't think *Dark Knight* is immoral or Fascistic anyway. The beef seems to be that Batman is a vigilante whomping on bad guys without consideration for their constitutional rights. Folks, this is a generic convention not a political statement. Frank Miller and Alan Moore are having fun these days playing with the "real life" consequences of costumed do-gooders but superheroes are a fantasy and their roots go a little deeper than *Death Wish* or Bernard Goetz.

Batman has perhaps the strongest origin of any character in comics and yet I think it's often misunderstood. I don't think he's motivated by revenge at all. I think the Batman is a man without innocence trying to protect the innocent. Like the John Wayne character, Ethan, in *The Searchers*, Batman is a raw, primitive force who makes order possible—but has no place within that order. He's committed to the ideals but not the methods of civilization. In mythic terms he is the culture hero. He is a *Dark Knight*—a man who can battle the forces of evil on their own terms.

As Miller points out in *Dark Knight #3* Batman is a criminal. He is a man outside the law and "to live outside the law you must be honest" (Bobby Z.). But this must be understood within the context that Gotham has always been portrayed as a corrupt city. Batman and Superman were born in the '30s, not as adolescent power fantasies, but as symbols of justice and righteousness for the dispossessed. Superman's predecessor isn't Hercules or Lancelot but the Golem of the Jewish ghettos.

Vigilantism is not and never has been the theme of superheroes. Even though he dances around the idea of vigilantes, I think that Frank Miller understands this. I think he knows that Batman isn't trying to kill Joe Chill; he's trying to save a young child named Bruce Wayne.

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INDEX TO ADVERTISERS

Amazing Heroes	4, 5, 11	Eclipse	3, 14, 54
Blackthorne Publishing	23	Fantagraphics Books	2, 91
Comico	9, 63, 80, 85	Renegade Press	4, 36
Comics Interview	27	Slave Labor Graphics	19
Continuity	41	US Comics	89
DC Comics, ...	46, 47	Wild Think	35

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Lookalike Artists

By Dennis Pimple

Handwriting analysis has long been considered an effective way of determining the traits and personalities of people. Others, of course, list the practice with such scientifically preposterous methods as horoscope reading, tarot casting, head-bump examination, or disemboweled chicken rituals.

I myself have a new theory which applies to the common fandom question of, "I wonder what the artist/writer looks like?" I've found that artists and writers in comics often draw or write in a manner which gives a clue to their appearance.

I'm not talking about the Matt Wagner syndrome, where the lead character is intentionally drawn to resemble the artist. I'm referring to the observation that the style of comic creator's work often offers clues to how he/she may look.

The theory is supported by example, which follows. Most examples come from direct observation (mainly at last year's San Diego Comic Con), and some from seeing enough photographs to draw conclusions. The list is, of course, hardly comprehensive.

Artists Who Look Like They Draw

Jack Kirby immediately springs to mind. Although not massive, Kirby is solid, with strong, square features. His hands (which, unfortunately, I never saw curled in a fist) are large in proportion to his body, and his head is a clearly-defined block (helped by a close-cropped haircut). One can sense a great physical power within him, which can also be sensed in his characters.

Will Eisner has developed a drawing style that resembles himself, or perhaps it's that he changed himself physically to suit his art (shades of *The Twilight Zone!*). While many think that Eisner was predicting the future by drawing Commissioner Dolan to look like himself 40 years later, it is actually now that Eisner most resembles his work. Loose and

relaxed, his characters are comfortable in their setting, and one senses the same calm from the appearance of Eisner.

Wendi Pini—it's almost cliché to include her in the list. Her open, round, joyful style matches her personality perfectly. Maybe it's because she's small and has big eyes (her hair covers her ears, so I lack conclusive proof).

Milt Caniff is an Eisner-contemporary with a much different style which nevertheless reveals something about himself. Dark and solid, with features chiseled from marble and only slightly polished. His economy of line on his characters and attention to detail on the surrounding environment match the photos I've seen of him in his office, surrounded by organized clutter.

Robert Crumb, with thick glasses that magnify his eyes, large, prominent teeth, and gangly, disjointed limbs, looks like he's be comfortable hanging out with Mr. Natural. His clothes make him look solidly cross-hatched. I remember, upon seeing a photograph of Crumb only recently after years of reading his work, thinking, "Of course that's how he looks!"

Bob Layton is super clean, meticulously neat, agonizingly precise, of perfect height and proportion. He has this sort of gleam about him as well, not unlike his well-remembered work in *Iron Man*.

Gil Kane makes the list by a nose. Kane is a very tall, lanky, and rather reserved, unlike his smooth, round, energetic art. But that nose... everybody less than six feet tall gets a view of Kane's nose remarkably similar to all those shots from the Atom's point of view. My guess is that Kane had a mirror at desk level from which he made reference.

Frank Miller is dark, slight of build, with an air of quiet authority about him. At San Diego, he went unshaven and disheveled, giving his form a fuzzy, indistinct look, like a dazed and beaten Matt Murdock.

Bill Sienkiewicz is a man of jagged edges and constant motion, both with his appearance and his art. His hair is never "in place" in the conventional sense of the term, but even as it shoots at every angle from his head it seems precisely "in place." His drawing is distinct and exact in

its own energetic fashion.

Marshall Rogers has the same firm jaw-line that he gives his characters. Seeing him for the first time give one a sense of déjà vu, for we've seen the face many times, with some modification or other, in the work he's done. My friend Shelly says he has feet just like the feet he draws, too.

With every rule there is an exception; with every theory conflicting evidence:

Artists Who Don't Look Like They Draw

Harvey Kurtzman—although pointy-nosed and a bit bug-eyed, has a dignified demeanor which is hardly indicated in his loose, manic art style.

Mike Kaluta is mirthful and sociable, as opposed to the delicate, quiet, introspective artist one might expect. His intelligence is indicated in his art, perhaps, but from his physical appearance there is no clue, save perhaps his neat, well-trimmed beard.

Peter Bagge, thank the Lord, looks nothing like the grotesque cartoon images he draws. Bagge looks so normal, in fact, that upon seeing the line-up at a Fantagraphics Books panel at the San Diego Con and recognizing every single other member at the table, I thought to myself, "who's the clean-cut guy on the end — and where's Peter Bagge?"

Writers, too, seem to mimic their physical attributes in their writing, although it is less obvious than in artists. Here are a few samples I could come up with:

Writers Who Look Like They Write

Stan Lee immediately springs to mind in this category. Anyone who has seen him in action knows that his writing is simply his mannerisms placed on paper. Perhaps it's unfair to include Lee in the list, though. He has so long had to live up to his printed image, that it is hard to say if it's the personality influencing the style or vice versa.

Jan Strnad is quiet and thoughtful, with casual humor and a homey sort of sophistication. Like his writing style, he is clear, with a natural elegance.

Chris Claremont—perhaps the most well-known writer currently working in comics, is commanding

in appearance—bombastic, formal, and introspective all at the same time. This is another case of the writer's style changing to match his personality; Claremont's current style is distinctively his own, and it fits his appearance perfectly.

Peter Bagge talks exactly like his writes; hilarity builds with each sentence. As mentioned before, he looks quite normal, but his personality is quite bent, like his humor. It seems to me that Bagge's humor can't help itself; he is simply funny every time he talks or sits at the drawing board.

And finally, there is the other side of the writers' coin. Surprisingly, there are few names who immediately come to mind, but I think it's less because most writers look like they write than that there are so few distinctive writing styles in comics in the first place.

Writers Who Don't Look Like They Write

Alan Moore looks more suited for writing heavy metal rock music than the fine, formal prose he is known for. Indeed, he has written lyrics for a band in addition to his comics work. His unkempt demeanor is nothing like his organized, elegant writing, save for the unsettling intensity just below the surface.

Elaine Lee is a writer whose ability makes one suppose a person of aloof intelligence, distant thoughtfulness. Quite the contrary, though—she's personable, friendly, and one suspects quite the hell-raiser. She complemented Kaluta well as they traveled the convention circuit. She does display the wit and sense of humor she gives her characters, though.

Bob Burden looks like a CPA. That he is the master of dada sloganeering and disjointed, loopy plot advancement is more appropriate in the Flaming Carrot world than on this Earth. That one who looks so bland would have such talent for the bizarre seems patently against nature.

How all this should be interpreted, either as compliment or criticism, is beyond me. After all, at best I've said that some people look like a bunch of damn cartoons.

In the final analysis, though, it seems that even though they don't always look like their work, any creator of individual style gives evidence of himself or herself in the work. On thinking more about it, this becomes obvious; it's an essential part of the definition of art, and comic art is no exception. ●

NEXT ISSUE:

AMAZING HEROES

No. 100

SPECIAL JACK KIRBY ISSUE!



For the centenary issue of AMAZING HEROES, we honor the greatest hero American comics have ever seen: JACK KIRBY! Join us for a book-length tribute that includes:

- A long interview with Kirby conducted by his longtime friend MARK EVANIER.
- An illustrated essay on why Kirby's art works as well as it does by inker/colorist GREG THEAKSTON.
- Hawkman artist RICHARD HOWELL's ten favorite Kirby Comics, from Golden Age Captain Americas to New Gods (including romance and western stories and an FF or two!).
- Written and illustrated tributes to Kirby by his fellow professionals, including FRANK MILLER, KEVIN O'NEILL, DOUG MOENCH, JAIME and GILBERT HERNANDEZ, DAVE GIBBONS, SCOTT SHAW!, SCOTT MCCLOUD, JOSH QUAGMIRE, WALLY WOOD, STAN LEE, and dozens more!
- And a spectacular cover pencilled by Kirby, inked by STEVE RUDE, and colored by TOM LUTH.

Don't miss this long-deserved tribute to the King of Comics!

A QUICKIE WITH STEVE RUDE

What did you like about *Space Ghost*?
It was the feeling of power he had. He was omnipotent.

How does *Sundra's* hair do that?
Lots of hairspray.

What mainstream characters would you like to draw?
Mainstream? None, really. Except Mr. Miracle. That's going to be fun. I was born to do that.

What writers, besides Mike Baron, would you like to work with?
I've always wanted to work with Mark Evanier and now I'll be doing the Mr. Miracle one-shot with him.

Who do you consider a hot artist working now?
Uhm... Tony Salmons.

Mark Waid wants to know how *Nexus* sees red through his visor. I have no idea.

Who are your influences?
Well, I spent my high school years copying Jack Kirby comics. And there's the Russ Manning comparison I get, which is flattering. I have a dim memory of reading *Magnus* as a kid, but it wasn't until I was in art school that I really discovered *Magnus*. That influence isn't intentional.

What's your favorite issue of *Nexus*?
Besides the black and white #1, I'd say the issue we just finished, "Clairborne." I think it's the best single issue story we've done.

What *Nexus* characters are especially fun to draw?
I love Sundra. She's modeled after my ideal woman and *Nexus* is my ideal man. I despise Clonezone. I hope he dies a horrible death soon. Mezzrow is fun. He's at that gawky teenaged stage. He just keeps getting taller and skinnier.

What music do you listen to as you draw?
I was just listening to some Bernard Herrmann. He's the guy that did the soundtracks for *Journey to the Center of the Earth* and *Psycho*. Have you ever listened to him? It's great stuff.

CAPSULE REVIEWS

MR. MONSTER #6

Mr. Monster is one of those characters I wish I'd thought of. From the first, the concept had instant appeal: a pulp style superhero who battles monsters—it had to be utterly and obviously trivial, maybe even stupid enough to become a treasured "guilty pleasure."

I'd be able to tilt the chair back against the wall, plop my feet on the table, and wallow in simple inanity for a few heady minutes without worrying about things like the hazards of nuclear power (provided I skipped editor cat yronwode's editorial).

So how'd Mr. Monster turn in to something I had to slog through?

Michael Gilbert is incredibly clever, but Mr. Monster is a study in excess. Even the letters page is an offensive amalgam of red type on a solid yellow background with green spot illos and headlines.

Virtually every page is full bleed, lettering stretches from the foreground to the background—in perspective—panels fly around the

page trying to read Mr. Monster is like listening to an orchestra containing every instrument in the world playing at once at full volume.

I could love this book, but too much is too much. —Jan Strnad

SWAMP THING #52

Alan Moore's doing the right thing. He's quitting *Swamp Thing*. Not just yet, but soon. Much as I'd loved Moore's work with the character (which is, a lot) I sense the beginning of the end creatively. *Swamp Thing* has been pushed to the limits, becoming steadily more powerful until he's reached his current godlike status—not had for somebody who used to be just a walking pile of muck.

Where *Swamp Thing* used to shame, Moore has taught him to stride; to project himself through "the green" to anyplace on the globe, even into the nether regions; and now, to virtually fly like an

emerald fireball through the tops of trees. I really liked him best in the middle of his locomotive evolution, when he wriggled his way through the water pipes and grew out of the end of a faucet. The vegetative mass that erupts from the earth of Gotham City in *Swamp Thing* #52 is too typically superherosish, and not nearly as fascinating.

And the current story premise—that a human woman would be ostracized from today's society, arrested and publicly shamed for consorting with a vegetable—just doesn't make sense. She'd more likely wind up on *The David Letterman Show* and the cover of *People* magazine.

Alan Moore's done more and better with the *Swamp Thing* than anyone in the creature's history, and the book's still one of the best on the market. It's time for Moore to finish the saga and leave us to treasure forever those definitive issues between 20 and 50.

—Jan Strnad

NEXUS #25

I keep wondering why Steve Rude doesn't win some "Best Artist" awards. His style's clean and effective, his characters are individualized, his action sequences are dynamic—damn hard to criticize seriously in any respect.

Mike Baron ought to receive some honors, too. His stories are intelligent and well thought out, full of bizarre characters and human ones as well.

Les Dorscheid's coloring is top-notch. The lettering's legible. The printing's good. The price isn't out of line.

This issue is less intense than other issues of *Nexus* have been—there's no real challenge for Horror Hellpop (*Nexus*) to face, nothing that can stand up to its awesome powers. It might even be regarded as a comparatively slender story by *Nexus* standards... which means it's only two or three times better than the average mainstream title. But it also sets the stage for obvious threats to come, functioning as an excellent prologue if Baron and Rude follow through. History suggests they will.

Why aren't fans snapping up *Nexus* like crazy? Why isn't it on virtually everyone's "must buy" list? Why aren't these guys rich?

Some cynical retailers would say, "It's too good to be really popular." That strikes me as a truly lousy explanation.

But I don't have a better one. —Jan Strnad

CEREBUS #85

Dave Sim's been taking a lot of flak lately because *Cerebus* hasn't been as strongly directed plotwise as many readers would prefer. It's been a little on the slender-price side, too, weighing in at twenty story pages in black and white on newsprint for \$1.70. (A recently announced price increase to \$2.00 was headed off at the pass.)

Admittedly it's a quick read, low verbal density. This issue chronicles a lighthearted, not particularly poignant meeting between *Cerebus*, Mick Jagger, and Keith Richards. Amusing, but nothing that sticks to the ribs.

Cerebus makes me wonder about the price of amusement in comic books these days. Most aren't amusing (or entertaining) at all, so have a value of zero. These are easy to pass up at any price, even free, not being worth the time one would invest in reading them. *Cerebus* is mildly amusing and comes at a premium price in terms of money but a small price in terms of time. A few chuckles for \$1.70 and about five minutes. Is it worth the cost?

I guess it depends on how badly you need the chuckles.

—Jan Strnad



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Great Britain

United States

Argentina

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ESPEERS™

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NEWS

1985 Eagle Awards announced: Winners include Moore, Crisis on Infinite Earths

The British fans have voted on the annual Eagle Awards for work published in 1985, and here's a list of the winners in each category—along with, for the American section, runners-up.

Favorite Comic Book Artist (Penciller): **GEORGE PEREZ**. Runners-up: **ART ADAMS** and **JOHN BYRNE**.

Favorite Comic Book Artist (Inker): **TERRY AUSTIN**. Runners-up: **JOHN TOTLEBEN** and **JERRY ORDWAY**.

Favorite Comic Book Writer: **ALAN MOORE**. Runners-up: **CHRIS CLAREMONT** and **MARV WOLFMAN**.

Favorite Comic Book: *Saga of the Swamp Thing*. Runners-up: *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and *The X-Men*.

Favorite Graphic Novel: *American Flag: Hard Times*. Runners-up: *She-Hulk* and *The Raven Banner*.

Favorite Character: **Batman**. Runners-up: **Wolverine** and **Swamp Thing**.

Favorite Group or Team: **The X-Men**. Runners-up: **Teen Titans** and **Fantastic Four**.

Favorite Villain: **Anti-Monitor**. Runners-up: **The Joker** and **The Kingpin**.

Favorite Supporting Character: **John Constantine**. Runners-up: **Abby Cable** and **Raul**. (This is the only category where the same book—here, *Swamp Thing*—placed twice.)

Most Worthy of Own Title: **Wolverine**. Runners-up: **Longshot** and **Green Arrow**.

Favorite Comic Book Story: *Crisis on Infinite Earths #1-9*. Runners-up: *X-Men Annual #9*, *New Mutants Special #1* and *"American Gothic"* (*Swamp Thing* #37).

Favorite New Title: *Miracleman*. Runners-up: *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and *Moonshadow*.



Favorite Cover: *Swamp Thing* #34. Runners-up: *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #7 and *New Mutants Special* #1.

Favorite Specialist Publication: *Amazing Heroes*. (Thank you.) Runners-up: *Comics Journal* and *Comics Interview*.

BRITISH CATEGORY: The big winner this year was the series "The Ballad of Halo Jones" in *2000 A.D.*, which won top awards for writer **ALAN MOORE**. "Favorite Character," "Most Worthy of Own Title," and "Best Story." Only "Halo" artist **IAN GIBSON** was pushed into second place by a landslide victory for **ALAN DAVIS**, whose work on *Captain Britain* also won "Favorite New Comic," "Favorite Cover," and "Favorite Supporting Character" (Meggan). The "Nemesis" series won two top honors for its two creators, **JOHN WAGNER** and **KEVIN O'NEILL**. "Favorite Comic Album" (for *Nemesis Book III*) and "Favorite Villain" (Torquemada).

"The Ballad of Halo Jones" will soon be available to American fans via a three-volume reprint from Titan Books, and the *Nemesis* volume was released last year, also by Titan Books.

Speakeasy walked away with the "Special Publication" award, and Alan Moore was added to the "Roll of Honor," beating out **DICK GIORDANO**.

Ms. Tree: Special issue, plus new paper

Ms. Tree Summer Special #1, which replaces the regular *Ms. Tree* comic on the August schedule, will feature a three-color process rather than the standard duotone the comic has been printed in since #10.

Artist **TERRY BEATTY** will be working with a combination of black, brown, and blue inks, in what he describes as "an aesthetic experiment—and as a bonus to our regular readers."

The *Summer Special*, which co-stars *Ms. Tree* and **Mike Mist**, is billed as a "Rock & Roll Summer Special"; it also includes a back-up: "The Bobby Darin Story."

Beginning with issue #30, *Ms. Tree* graduates to a better paper stock and higher cost (\$2.00). The better paper stock (the same one as the one used for the *Files of Ms. Tree* books) was tested on #25, and both the publisher and Collins and Beatty were happy enough to go with the change.

Publisher **DENI LOUBERT** said: "The screens look so much cleaner on this paper that we talked to our printers about the cost of switching. It is a bit more, but the look is so nice we decided to go ahead with it."

DC Miscellanea: Guice on new Flash

PEOPLE: JACKSON GUICE, last seen working on *X-Factor*, will be the artist working on the new *Flash* comic scripted by MIKE BARON

... MIKE MACHLAN will be ink-ing at least the first issue of *Adventures of Superman*, #424; the writer and penciller remain MARV WOLFMAN and JERRY ORDWAY ... and ERNIE COLON did the cover for *Who's Who* #23.

HEROES: Two more former Charlton heroes enter the DC fold this fall and winter, joining *Blue Beetle* as regular monthly series: *The Question* will be written by DENNY O'NEIL and drawn by ERNIE COLON, and will premiere in November, and will be followed by *Captain Atom*, whose creative team has not yet been announced. ... *All-Star Squadron* #64 features the pencilling of WAYNE BORING, inked by MIKE GUSTOVICH; then, in #65, all the secrets behind Johnny Quick's origin are revealed; that one's illustrated by DON HECK and TONY DEZUNIGA. ... The Catwoman turns back to evil in *Detective* #570.



Solson Pubs: How to draw turtles, and patriotism too

Solson Publications, under the aegis of publisher GARY BRODSKY, will be releasing a series of comics over the summer.

How to Draw Eastman & Laird's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles debuts in July. KEVIN EASTMAN and PETER LAIRD, with the help of RICH BUCKLER, show readers how to draw the quartet of turtles; the 32-page book will be scripted by ALLAN J. FROMBERG and will cost \$2.25.



August sees the release of *Eastman & Laird's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Martial Arts Training Manual*. Published in the same format as the previous book, this one will feature, as the press release puts it, "Leonardo, Donatello, Mi-chaelangelo, and Raphael teaching authentic martial arts techniques as originated in the Orient." A genuine fifth degree black belt karate expert has been hired to serve as consultant on the book.

America fights back in *Reagan's Raiders*, a bi-monthly series starring the President of the United States as the Rambo-ish commander of an anti-terrorist squad battling the Worldwide Terrorist Organization. This "ultimate pro-American, patriotic comic book" will premiere in August. The creative staff is ALLAN J. FROMBERG, script, and DICK AYERS, art. RICH BUCKLER is the cover artist.

Tentatively scheduled for September is *Comic Talent Star Search*, a 32-page comic book that includes eight pages with blank word balloons. Readers are supposed to fill in the words; each issue, the best previous submission will be printed.

More all-star artists for Jonny Quest

Comico has added several star comics artists to the roster of its wildly successful *Jonny Quest* comic, written by WILLIAM MESSNER-LOEBES.

Issue #3, to be released in August, sports a cover by DAVE STEVENS. The story, entitled "Guns for the Laughing Man," is illustrated by the team of MARC HEMPEL and MARK WHEATLEY.

September's issue #4, which takes place on the set of a grade-B monster movie, is pencilled and inked by TOM YEATES and DAN ADKINS. The cover is a wrap-around illustration pencilled by Yeates, inked by AL WILLIAMSON, and colored by MATT WAGNER.

Issue #5 co-stars Jezebel Jade, and is pencilled by MITCH (D)Agents) SCHAUER and inked by JOHN (Nexus) NYBERG. This one also sports another cover by Dave Stevens.

Future issues will feature work by (in order) ADAM KUBERT, DAN SPIEGLE, KEN STEACY, MURPHY ANDERSON, BRENT ANDERSON, and others. And *Quest* creator DOUG WILDEY will execute at least one more cover.

"It's an editor's dream to be working with so many talented people in the production of a comic book



Dave Stevens's cover for *Jonny Quest* #5, which features interior art by Mitch Schauer and John Nyberg.

based on one of the best and most fondly-remembered cartoons of my childhood," says editor DIANA SCHUTZ.

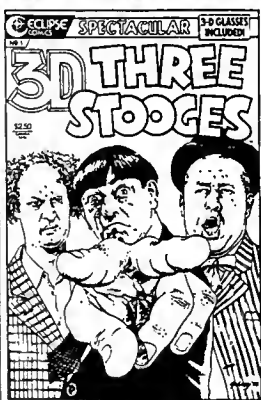
Eclipse: True crime, bellcose mailmen, and Three Stooges-mania

CRIME: *Mr. Monster's True Crime* is another journey through the past, as Doc Stearn introduces three classic tales by JACK COLE, all from *True Crime Comics* #2 and 3. This one includes "Murder, Morphine, and Me!" (cited in *Seduction of the Innocent*), "Demon's Dance of Galloway Moor," and "Match for Satan." It's \$1.75 and coming your way in September.

LAND OF MILKMEN: Reid Fleming, billed as "the World's Toughest Milkman," will be returning to comics in all-new adventures published by Eclipse this fall.

Created by DAVID BOSWELL, the pugnacious dairy deliveryman originally appeared in a Canadian underground newspaper from 1978-1979. Collected in comics form by Last Gasp in 1980, *Reid Fleming* proved popular with fans, with his book going into a second printing in 1985; Boswell himself also published *Heartbreak Comics*, in which Fleming played a major role.

Eclipse will be reprinting *Reid Fleming* #1 in August. Beginning in October with a new #1, Reid Fleming will then appear three times a year.



WOOB WOOB WOOB! A special treat for Stooges fans will be coming along this summer as Eclipse reprints the classic 1953 *Three Stooges* 3-D comic. In addition to replacing Shemp with Curly for this edition (a move sure to delight most Stoogephiles), Eclipse will be spicing it up with a new PAUL GUL-ACY cover. Nyuk nyuk nyuk. ●

Dark Knight spawns spoofs

With the alluring example of the various *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* parodies in front of them, publishers are returning to the source: FRANK MILLER (whose *Ronin* begat it all), for satirical fodder. And so at least four different publishers have announced parodies of Miller's *Dark Knight*.

Eclipse's *Clint*, a two-issue spin-off from *Adolescent Radioactive Black Belt Hamsters*, is written and drawn by DON CHIN, KEN MEYER, Jr., and MIKE DRINGENBERG—the first issue's cover ("The Hamster Triumphant") being a specific parody of *Dark Knight* #1.

The second issue of Blackthorne's *Laffin' Gas* devotes itself to this popular subject, with "Ye Dark Knight Returneth" by DON CHIN and PARSONAVICH (of "Hamsters" fame), "Dark Nightie" by CHRIS MacGILLIVRAY and DAVE GARCIA (of "Panda Khan" fame); "Dork Nyte" by WILLIAM VAN HORN; and "Bath Knight" by ANDREW ICE.



Canadians get into the act too, as Andromeda releases *Pork Knight*, written and drawn by ROB WALTON.

And Sirius Comics features MARK MARTIN's *Gnatrat: The Dark Gnat Returns*.

Meanwhile, Blackthorne is also releasing a spoof of *Man of Steel* called *The Man of Rust*. Written by CLIFF MacGILLIVRAY, illustrated by RICK BURCHETT, and edited by MIKE FRIEDRICH, the issue will even feature two different covers, spoofing DC's two different covers to *Man of Steel* #1.

Amazingly, every single one of these goes on sale in September. ●

New from Aardvark-Vanaheim

Aardvark-Vanaheim has announced two new series that will premiere later this year.

Puma Blues, created by newcomers STEPHEN MURPHY and MICHAEL ZULLI, is set in the year 2000 and deals with the consequences of a significant event that takes place in 1995. *Puma Blues* is scheduled to debut during the summer.

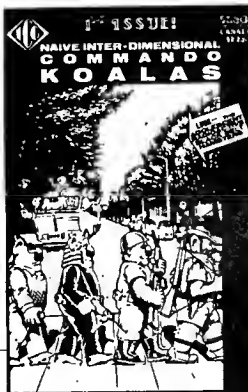
The second title, codenamed "*The October Project*," is a horror title created by STEPHEN BISSETTE and JOHN TOTLEBEN. No other details (including the other creators involved) have been released yet, but it's planned for a fall release.

Both of these titles will sell for \$1.70—and so will A-V's flagship title *Cerebus the Aardvark*, despite earlier reports that the title was going to \$2.00. ●

Hamsters cross over with Commando Koalas

Independent Comics' *Naive Inter-dimensional Commando Koalas* (NICK), written by SEAN DEMING and drawn by DANNY GREEN, will cross over into Eclipse's *Adolescent Radioactive Black Belt Hamsters* (ARBH) this summer.

NICK #1, which ships on August 24, takes place immediately after ARBH #3, and leads directly into ARBH in 3-D #2. During their exploits in *NICK*, the Hamsters pick up what Eclipse refers to as "an important piece of traveling equipment," making the story a vital part of continuity. ●



Dark Horse Comics features work from Warner, Chadwick, and others

A new Oregon-based comics company, Dark Horse, is releasing a new title: *Dark Horse Presents*. The bi-monthly anthology title will feature four ongoing series: "Black Cross," by *Dr. Strange* artist CHRIS WARNER; "Brighter!" and "Concrete," both by *Dazzler* artist PAUL CHADWICK; and "Mindwalk," by RANDY STRADLEY and *American Flag!* inker RANDY EMBERLIN.

Future issues will include work by J.M. DeMATTEIS and MARK BADGER, as well as JOHN WORKMAN.

Also scheduled for release in July is *Boris the Bear Slaughters the Teenage Radioactive Black Belt Mutant Ninja Critters*. A creation of JAMES DEAN SMITH, *Boris* is a satire on the influx of Turtle-derived parody books; it is co-scripted by publisher MIKE RICHARDSON, RANDY STRADLEY, and Smith.

Both of these will be 32 pages on newsprint for \$1.50. Two more titles will follow in December. ●



A panel from "Concrete," written and drawn by Chris Warner.

Eclipse to release Dave Stevens items

Eclipse Comics has announced that it will be releasing a hardcover edition of DAVE STEVENS's *Rocketeer* graphic album, currently available only as a softcover volume. (Graphitti's 1985 signed limited hardcover edition of the album has been sold out for months.) The \$19.95 book is scheduled to ship in September.

Eclipse will also eventually collect the second *Rocketeer* series (the comic book version of which will be published by Comico) into an album. Release date on the comic has not yet been determined, since Stevens is currently involved in a lawsuit brought against him by Marvel Comics, which claims ownership of the "Rocketeer" name because of prior use in *Daredevil* and *ROM*. (The name was used for a group of villains that has not been seen since.) [See *The Comics Journal* #110 for details on the story.] ●

Eclipse will also be releasing a series of 12 Stevens posters, beginning in November with Stevens's cover to *Seduction of the Innocent* 3-D #1. ●

New Canadian publisher creates comic book to benefit the hungry

A new Toronto-based comics company, artworx (with a small a), is putting together a title that will benefit the foodbanks of Canada, providing aid to the needy.

Canadian Comic Cavalcade will boast the talents of many Canadians, among them TY TEMPLETON, KEN STEACY, MARK SHAINBLUM, GABRIEL MORRISSETTE, DEAN MOTTER, PAUL RIVOCHÉ, ANTHONY VAN BRUGGEN, CHESTER BROWN,

DAVE DARRIGO, RICK TAYLOR, and PETER HSU.

artworx editor/publisher GIDEON STEINBERG intends to prove with this, and with subsequent publications, that non-American comics "are just as good as, if not better" than comics produced in the U.S.

Canadian Comics Cavalcade will be 40 pages long and will sell for \$1.70. PAUL RIVOCHÉ is coloring the jam-style cover. ●



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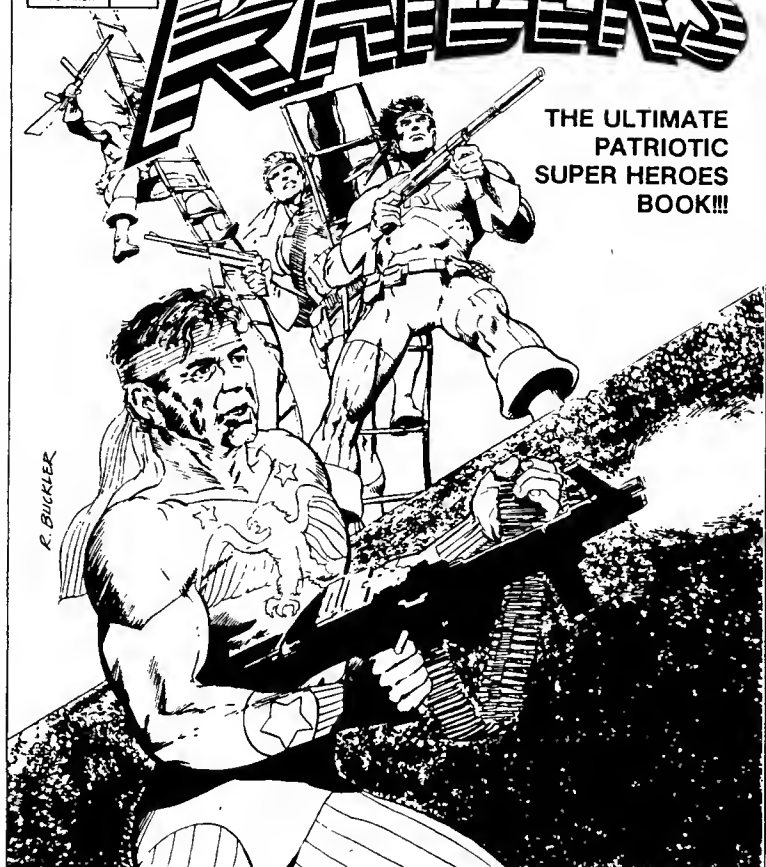


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ARROW COMICS

□ NIGHTSTREETS #1

Crime lords, cops and robbers, reporters, hitmen, vigilantes, and investigators. This comic has them all.

Story/Art **Mark Bloodworth**
[\$1.50 black-and-white comic, ships in July]

BAM PRODUCTIONS

□ ADAM AND EVE A.D. #6

Adam and Eve find themselves caught up in the middle of a war between Cleveland and Pittsburgh.

Story **Murray & Sharp**
Art **Zimmelman & Martinec**
[\$1.50 black-and-white comic, ships 7/18]

BLACKTHORNE COMICS

□ ALIEN WORLDS BOOK ONE

Reprinting work by Al Williamson, Tim Conrad, George Perez, Bruce Jones, John Bolton, Tom Yeates, and more.

Stories **Bruce Jones**
[\$5.95 black-and-white trade paperback, ships in July]

□ KERRY DRAKE BOOK TWO

The Squirrel, Dr Zero, and Cozy Caresse are just some of the villains in this volume.

Story **Allen Saunders**
Art **Al Andriola**
[\$5.95 black-and-white trade paperback, ships in July]

□ LITTLE NEMO BOOK TWO

Story/Art **Winsor McCay**
[\$5.95 black-and-white trade paperback, ships in July]

□ TARZAN BOOK THREE

Story/Art **Russ Manning**
[\$5.95 black-and-white trade paperback, ships in July]

COMICO COMICS

□ JONNY QUEST #2

The never-before-told story of the death of Jonny's Mother and how Race Bannon joined the Quests.

Story **William Messner-Loeb**
Art **Pini and Staton**
[\$1.50 full-color comic on white paper, ships 7/18]

□ ROBOTECH: THE NEW GENERATION #9

Scott, Rand and Annie discover "The



Genesis Pit," where time runs amok as the Invad create a living laboratory for experiments in genetics and evolution.

Story **Mark Burbey**
Art **Byers & Poston**
[\$1.50 color comic on white paper, ships 7/18]

COMICS INTERVIEW

□ ARISTOCRATIC XTRATERRESTRIAL TIME-TRAVELING THIEVES #1

Fred and Bianca are out to steal Earth's greatest treasure.

Story **Henry Vogel**
Art **Mark Propst**
[\$1.75 black-and-white comic, ships in July]



□ SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #16

A 16th century sorcerer joins the Knights in battle.

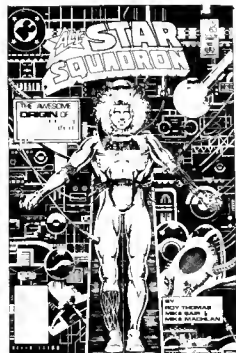
Story **Henry Vogel**
Art **Mark Propst**
[\$1.75 black-and-white comic, ships in July]

DC COMICS

□ ADVENTURES OF THE OUTSIDERS #39

Starting with this issue, *Adventures* will reprint stories from *Outsiders*. The Nuclear family appears this ish.

Story **Mike W. Barr**
Art **Jim Aparo**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]



□ ALL-STAR SQUADRON #63

The origin of Robotman.

Story **Roy Thomas**
Art **Mike Hernandez**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/29, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ BLUE DEVIL #30

Double-sized Summer-Fun issue! It's BD vs. the Flash's Rogues' Gallery.

Story **Mishkin & Cohn**
Art **Kupperberg & Cullins**
Cover **Cullins & Martin**
[\$1.25 48-page color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ BOOSTER GOLD #10

Trixie is kidnapped by the 1000.

Story **Dan Jurgens**
Art/Cover **Jurgens & DeCarlo**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

DETECTIVE COMICS #568

Legends Tie-in The Penguin traps Bat-guy. Squawk!

Story **Joey Cavelleri**
Art **Kleus Jensen**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/29; newsstand o/s 8/21]

GREEN LANTERN CORPS #206

Guy Gardner returns, but whose side is he on?

Story **Steve Englehart**
Art **Stetson & Farmer**
Cover **Stetson & Patterson**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]



HAWKMAN #4

Zatanna guest stars as the Hawks hunt down Kite Man. Wait 'til you discover Kite Man's secret identity.

Story **Tony Isabella**
Art **Howell & Heck**
Cover **Howell & Giordano**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/29; newsstand o/s 8/21]

INFINITY, INC. #32

The Psycho-Pirate is the bad guy. Jonni Thunder and Thunderbolt are the extra good guys.

Story **R. & D. Thomas**
Art **McFarlane & DeZuniga**
[75¢ color comic on white paper, ships 7/22]

LORDS OF THE ULTRA-REALM #6

Last issue The final fate of Falkon with two worlds hanging in the balance.

Story **Doug Moench**
Art/Cover **Pat Broderick**
[75¢ direct-sales color comic, ships 7/29]

THE MAN OF STEEL #4

Lex Luthor makes his move to de-throne Superman

Story/Pencils **John Byrne**
Inks **Dick Giordano**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/29, newsstand o/s 8/21]

NEW TEEN TITANS #26

Brother Blood is resurrected on world-wide TV

Story **Marv Wolfmen**
Art **Berreto & Tanghal**
[75¢ color comic on white paper, ships 7/22]

SPACE CLUSTERS GRAPHIC NOVEL

A century long intergalactic chase turns hunter and hunted into amalgamations of flesh, metal and living stars. Scripted by ex-Amazing Heroes editor Art Cover, painted art by Alex Nino.
[4.95 full color graphic novel; ships 7/22]

SUPER POWERS #3

Darksied escapes to earth and the mysterious Janus saves the Super Powers team.

Story **Paul Kupperberg**
Art **Infantino & Mercos**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22; newsstand o/s 8/14]

SWAMP THING #54

Swamp Thing's funeral. Boo hoo, yeah right. Wasn't he just buried back in issue #26 or something?

Story **Alen Moore**
Art **Veltch & Alcalá**
Cover **Steve Bisette**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

TALES OF THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES #341

The new Legionnaires' first mission. Reprinted from Legion #16.

Story **Paul Levitz**
Art **Lightle & B. Smith**
Cover **Steve Lightle**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/29, newsstand o/s 8/21]

TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS ANNUAL #4

Reintroducing the galaxy's most powerful super-team: the Vanguard. Reprints NTT Annual #1.

Story **Merv Wolfman**
Art **Hannigan & DeCarlo**
Cover **Ed Hennigan**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/29, newsstand o/s 8/14]

TEEN TITANS SPOTLIGHT #4

Jencho continues his search across Europe for the girl he once loved.

Story **Marv Wolfman**
Art **Ross Andru**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/29, newsstand o/s 8/21]

VIGILANTE ANNUAL #2

Adnan Chase goes from judge to defendant, while Vigilante faces off against Cannon and Saber.

Story **Paul Kupperberg**
Art **Andru & DeZuniga**
[75¢ 48-page color comic on white paper, ships 7/22]



WARLORD #111

Travis battles a sea-monster with Shakira's life at stake.

Story **Michael Fleisher**
Art **Ron Randall**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

WHO'S WHO #21

Sssssssss—Sivana to Stalker.

Text **Len Wein**
Art **Various**
Cover **Perez & Giordano**
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

DIMENSION GRAPHICS

ELFTREK #2

"The Hassle With Troublers."

Story **Lusk**
Art **Poe**
[75¢ black-and-white comic, ships 7/20]



HERO MAN #1

Two side-splitting blue-collar slugfests.

Story **Ken Jones**
Art **Rich Miller**
[75¢ black-and-white comic, ships 7/20]

ECLIPSE COMICS

ADOLESCENT RADIOACTIVE BLACK BELT HAMSTERS #3

The rowdy rodents blow up the Statue o' Liberty and participate in a prison brawl.

Story **Don Chin**
Art **Personovich**
[75¢ black-and-white comic, ships 7/15]

AIRBOY #1

The return of the golden-age hero in a bi-weekly, 16-page, 50 cent format.

Story **Chuck Dixon**
Art **Trumen & Yeates**
[50¢ color comic, ships 7/15]

AIRBOY #2

The return of Skywolf and Airboy's incredible plane, Birdie.

Story **Chuck Dixon**
Art **Trumen & Yeates**
[50¢ color comic, ships 7/29]

CHAMPIONS #3



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Dr. Arcane and Icestar desperately track a soul-shard (whatever that is)

Story **Dennis Mallonee**
Art **Carol Lay**
[51 25 color comic, ships 7/15]

CROSSFIRE AND RAINBOW #2

Crossfire is still trying to woo Rainbow into his bed and she's after a cyanide poisoner. Kinky or what?

Story **Mark Evanier**
Art **Dan Spiegel**
[51 25 color comic, ships 7/15]

DNAGENTS #11

Special summer-fun issue featuring five short stories

Story **Mark Evanier**
Art **Various**
Cover **Dennis Jensen**
[95* color comic, ships 7/22]

MIRACLEMAN #10

The conclusion to the origin of Miracleman

Story **Alan Moore**
Art **Rick Veitch**
[95* color comic, ships 7/29]

THE NEW WAVE #4

The six members of the New Wave are united for the first time

Story **Mindy Newell**
Art **Weeks & Templeton**
[16-page 50* color comic, ships 7/22]

THE SPIRAL PATH #2

The tale of Caed and Bethbara against the undead totem-king Artuk concludes

Story/Art **Steve Parkhouse**
[51 75 direct sale color comic, ships 7/29]

ETERNITY COMICS

EX-MUTANTS #1

In a post-holocaust world, everyone has been changed into a mutant—except for five ex-mutants!

Story **David Lawrence**
Art **Lim & Witherby**
[51 80 black-and-white comic, ships in July]

FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

DOOMSDAY SQUAD #4

More reprints of John Byrne's first work for Charlton

Story **Joe Gill**
Art **John Byrne**
Color **Wheatley & Mayer**
Plus a full color preview of **Miracle Squad** by John Wooley and Terry Tidwell
[52 00 full-color comic on white paper, ships July 23]

HONK! #1

The dry martini of humor mags, bringing together the funniest comic strips in the world. Includes interviews with **Don Martin** and **Mark Marek**. Strips by **Bob Boze Bell**, **Daniel Clowes**, **Eddie Campbell** and **Phil Elliott**. J.R. Williams and **Chester Brown**

Cover **Don Martin**
[52 75 black-and-white magazine, ships July]

PARTICLE DREAMS #1



"Shark Hunt"

The adventures of plucky girl 'techie **Keef Liama**—plus two back-up stories
Story/Art **Matt Howarth**
[52 25 black-and-white magazine, ships July]

FIRST COMICS



AMERICAN FLAGG! SPECIAL #1

Howard Chaykin returns as **Reuben** makes a wrong turn and winds up in the middle of **Time²**

Story/Art **Howard Chaykin**
[51 75 color comic on white paper, ships 7/11]

HAWKMOON: JEWEL IN THE SKULL #4

The conclusion of the first book in **Michael Moorcock's** **History of the Runestaff**.

Story **Gerry Conway**
Art **Kayanan & Rival**
[51 75 full-color comic on white paper, ships 7/18]

JON SABLE, FREELANCE #42

All by **Mike Grell**
[51 75 color comic on white paper, ships 7/18]

HARRIER COMICS

REDFOX #5

The beginning of the "Saga of the Demon Queen."

Story **Fox and Lewis**
Art **Fox**
[51 75 black-and-white comic on white paper, ships in July]

SWIFTSURE #10

Including the "H.M.S. Conqueror" serial
Story **Martin Lock**
Art **Latham & Hargood**
[51 75 black-and-white comic on white paper, ships in July]

MARVEL COMICS



AVENGERS #273

The debut of the new **Masters of Evil**.
Story **Roger Stern**
Art **J. Buscema & Palmer**
[75* color comic, ships 7/15, newsstand o/s 8/7]

CLASSIC X-MEN #3

Reprints the death of **Thunderbird** from **X-Men** #95 with five new pages by **Chris Claremont** and **Dave Cockrum**. Plus an 11-page story covering the funeral of **Thunderbird** by **Chris Claremont** and **John Bolton**

Story **Len Wein**
Art **Dave Cockrum**
[51 00 color comic, ships 7/22]

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #187

The Cimmerian battles **Wrarrir**, Devourer of Souls
Story **Jim Owsley**
Art/Cover **John Buscema**
Inks **Ernie Chan**
[75* color comic, ships 7/15, newsstand o/s 8/7]

D.P.7 #1

New Universe title **Seven** super-powered misfits debut in this new series

Story **Mark Gruenwald**
Art **Paul Ryan**
[75* color comic, ships 7/15, newsstand o/s 8/7]

FANTASTIC FOUR #296

Big Event Type Issue. This one celebrates the 25th anniversary of the FF (and thus Marvel) with pencilled art by **Buscema**, **Silvestri**, **Ordway**, **Windsor-Smith**, **Frenz** and **Milgrom**.



Inkers include Windsor-Smith, Colletta, Wiacek, Janson, Leialoha, Rubinstein, Gordon. Scripted by Stan Lee from a story by Jim Shooter.

Cover Barry Windsor-Smith
[\$1.50 64-page color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]



□ G.I. JOE #53

Hawk battles Cobra for the Pit.

Story Larry Hame
Art Whigham & Mushynsky
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/15, newsstand o/s 8/7]

□ HOWARD THE DUCK: SUPERSPECIAL #41

Adaptation of the George Lucas film.
Story Denny Fingeroth
Art Kyle Baker
[\$2.50 color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/7]

□ INCREDIBLE HULK #324

Is Bruce Banner the Hulk or not? Begins a new storyline

Story/Cover Al Milgrom
Art Gelger & Janke
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/15, newsstand o/s 7/22]

□ IRON MAN #211

Introducing the new Dominic Fortune.
Story Danny Fingeroth
Art Turner & Williams
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ JUSTICE #1

New Universe title. A warrior and law officer from another world lands on Earth where justice is a bit more complicated.

Story Archie Goodwin
Art Geoff Isherwood
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/15, newsstand o/s 8/7]

□ MARVEL FANFARE #29

John Byrne's experimental Hulk story, told entirely in splash pages.

Story/Art John Byrne
[\$1.50 direct-sales comic; ships 7/15]

□ MARVEL SAGA #12

Featuring the Avengers' discovery of Captain America and the debut of Iron Man's rad end gold armor.

Text Peter Sanderson
Cover Brent Anderson
[\$1.00 color comic; ships 7/15, newsstand o/s 8/7]

□ MARVEL TALES #193

Beginning reprints of the Claremont/Byrne Marvel Team-Up issues. From MT-U #59.

Story Chris Claremont
Art John Byrne
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/15, newsstand o/s 8/7]

□ MARVEL TEAM-UP INDEX #6

Text George Olshevsky
[\$1.25 color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ PETER PARKER, SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #120

Spider-Man vs. Spider-Man
Story/Pencils Larry Leiber
Inks Vince Colletta
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ SAVAGE TALES #7

Gore, War and More.
Story Various
Art Various
Cover Bob Camp
[\$1.50 black-and-white magazine; ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/7]

□ SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #20

The origin of the Iron Man of 2020.
Story Jim Owsley
Art Beechum & Wiacek
[\$1.25 color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/7]

□ SPITFIRE AND THE TROUBLESHOOTERS #1

Jenny Swensen and her pals from M.I.T. take on the Military/Industrial complex.
Plot Morelli & Brown
Script Gerry Conway
Art Art Trimpe & Sinnott
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ STARBRAND #1

Kenneth Connell has the most powerful weapon in the world, the Starbrand. And everybody wants it

Story Jim Shooter
Art John Romita, Jr.
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ THOR #373

Tie-in with the mutant massacre.
Story Walt Simonson
Art Sai Buscema
Cover Walt Simonson
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]



□ TRANSFORMERS #22

Introducing the Stunticons.
Story Bob Budiansky
Art Perlin/Akin & Garvey
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ X-FACTOR #10

Wait Simonson comes on as the regular artist as the mutant massacre continues.

Story Louise Simonson
Art/Cover Wait Simonson
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ X-MEN #211

BIG NEWS. Three X-Men will be gone from the team after the mutant massacre.

Story Chris Claremont
Art Romita, Jr. & Green
Cover John Romita, Jr.
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/15, newsstand o/s 8/7]

MARVEL EPIC COMICS

□ ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN #2

Two SHIELD cyborgs, Garrett and Perry, are on Elektra's trail.

Story Frank Miller
Art Bill Sienkiewicz
[.50 color comic on white paper, ships 7/15]

□ ELFQUEST #16

Old Iriands reunite at The Forbidden Grove

Story W. & R. Pini
Art Wendy Pini
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ STEELGRIP STARKEY #3

Steelgrip, Ryan and Shan head to the frozen north.

Story/Pencils Alen Waia
Inks Jim Sherman
[.50 color comic on white paper; ships 7/22]

MARVEL STAR COMICS

□ CARE BEARS #7

The Care Bears try to cure Sad Solly, the saddest man in the world.

Story/Pencils Howard Poat
Art Roberta Edelman
[75¢ color comic; ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ MADBALLS #3

Final issue as the Madballs face the Badballs.

Story Dave Manek
Art Post & Edelman
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/22, newsstand o/s 8/14]

□ MUPPET BABIES #10

Bunsen and Beaker's weather machine gets out of control.

Story Sten Kay
Art Marie Severin
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/15, newsstand o/s 8/7]

NOW COMICS

□ RALPH SMART ADVENTURES #3

More lunatic adventures of the insane C.P.A.

Story/Art Merc Hensen.
[1.50 black-and-white comic, ships 7/30]

PRELUDE GRAPHICS



□ SURVIVORS #2

"The Brunt."

Story Steve Woron
Art Goodhart & Lewis
[1.95 black-and-white comic on white paper, ships 7/17]

QUALITY COMICS

□ The New-Look JUDGE DREDD #1

"The Cry of the Werewolf"

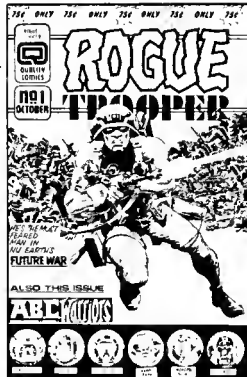
A feature-length story in the new format.

Story John Wagner
Art Steve Dillon
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/28]

□ ROGUE TROOPER #1

The last Genetic Infantryman wages a lone battle on Nu Earth.

Story Gerry Finley-Day
Art Dave Gibbons
Plus "The A.B.C. Warriors"
Story Pat Mills
Art Kevin O'Neill
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/28]



□ SAM SLADE #1

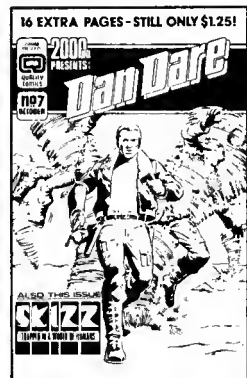
"The Beast of Blackheart Manor"

Story John Wagner
Art Ian Gibson
[75¢ color comic, ships 7/28]

□ 2000 AD PRESENTS #7

Dan Dare meets "The Death-Dealing Sand Devils"

Story Gerry Finley-Day
Art Dave Gibbons
Plus "Skizz"
Story Alan Moore
Art Jim Beagle
[48-page \$1.25 color comic, ships 7/28]

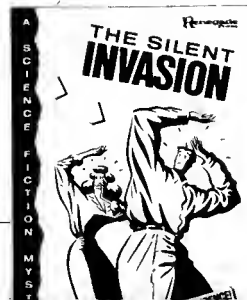


RENEGADE PRESS

□ FLAMING CARROT #13

Ult! Issue #13! Is this lucky or cabbage?

Story/Art Bob Burden
[1.70 black-and-white comic, ships in July]



□ SILENT INVASION #3

More paranoid fifties-style adventures.

Story Larry Hancock
Art Micheal Cherkas
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Art Barb Rausch
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Art Sears & Bryant
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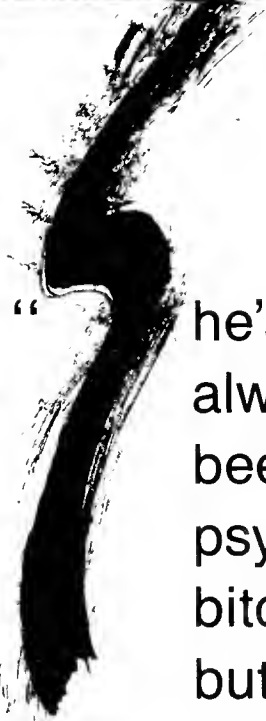
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ELEKTRA ASSASSIN



“He’s always been a psychopathic bitch, but...”

How can one simply describe *Elektra: Assassin*, the new eight-issue limited series from Marvel’s Epic Comics line? According to Elektra’s creator, Frank Miller, it is an action-adventure series in which “An evil monster has taken over the mind of the next president of the United States, and a psychotic ninja assassin is the only person who knows this and can possibly stop it.” There are many violent battles, car and helicopter chases, and, Miller says, “things blow up *real good*.” Miller himself, whose work is familiar from *Daredevil*, *Dark Knight*, and *Ronin*, is the writer of the series. The artwork is painted by Bill Sienkiewicz, who is probably best known to comics readers for his work on *Moon Knight* and *The New Mutants*. Jim Novak is the letterer, Jo Duffy is the series’ associate editor, and Archie Goodwin serves as its editor.

Elektra herself is the psychotic ninja assassin in question; the monster is a demon called the Beast. Miller created Elektra for his initial stint as writer/artist on *Daredevil*. She has been in love with Daredevil himself, as Matt Murdock, when they were both students at New York’s Columbia University. But Elektra left Matt after she was emotionally shattered by the accidental shooting of her father. Rejected by the martial arts teacher Stick, Elektra joined the Hand, a cult of killers who worshipped the Beast, and finally left them to become a freelance mercenary. After clashing with Matt as Daredevil, she was killed by his foe Bullseye and died in Matt’s arms. Yet it seems she was resurrected by mystical means. Elektra’s current fate will be revealed in the forthcoming *Elektra* graphic novel being written and drawn by Miller and colored by

BY PETER SANDERSON

Lynn Varley.

Elektra: Assassin is set in the past, at a time between Elektra's break with the Hand and her encounters with Daredevil. "What this series is really about," Frank Miller says, "is

much of her memory by the asylum's brutal shock treatments. At the end of the issue she realizes how she ended up in the asylum and breaks free.

Yet while everything so far stated

capable, opportunistic secret agent named John Garrett, who becomes Elektra's foil, pawn, slave, ally, and lover. The series is a psychological thriller dealing with both espionage, and the occult, a black comedy, a dark romance, and, in part, a political commentary. It is also a showcase for the most experimental work in comics yet seen by Miller as a writer and by Sienkiewicz as an artist.

Jo Duffy wrote the first story Frank Miller did for Marvel and during her brief term as editor of *Daredevil*, assigned him to the series. Now, as associate editor on *Elektra*, she finds herself working with Miller and Sienkiewicz on what she calls "among the most exhausting and rewarding and fun editing jobs I have ever had in my career. I think *Elektra* is the culmination of a creative phase for both Frank and Bill. It's extraordinary on both levels. The scripts are so good that they would give another writer a heart attack just to read them. The artwork is wonderful: it is clear and easy to follow visually, and very, very exciting, and beautiful. And it is a growing, organic thing. Every issue is a progression from what Bill's done before. I feel as if his whole career up to this point has been a progression leading up to what he did on the *Daredevil* graphic novel, and is doing in this *Elektra* limited series." (The *Daredevil* graphic novel, featuring the Kingpin, was written by Miller and has artwork by Sienkiewicz. Recently completed, it should be released before the end of the year.)

The world as presented in *Elektra: Assassin* is very different even from the one seen in Miller's *Daredevil* stories. *Elektra's* is a dark, grim world, where the divisions between good and evil are not immediately apparent, where moral compromise is common, where certain members of government operations engage in vicious inhumanity, and where heroism can sometimes be found only in the seemingly unlikeliest of individuals.

Elektra Herself

Why has Elektra gripped readers' imaginations so strongly in the past? "Sex and violence, the old story," Jo Duffy replies, laughing. "Actually, I think it's for the same reasons that a Wolverine fascinates them, or a Batman when he's handled in his darker persona. It's the hero who is maybe part villain, the tormented figure, somebody who's not all lily-



Elektra: ready for action.

Elektra in the darkest period of her life." In the first issue, which has already been released, we find Elektra in a madhouse, having been driven insane by the Beast and then having temporarily been deprived of

about *Elektra: Assassin* is true, it really does not even begin to describe what the series is about. There are actually two lead characters in the series: Elektra and a somewhat huffoonish, yet highly

white and rides a white horse or what have you. I think Elektra has the appeal of the violence and also the appeal of your knowing that when push comes to shove, chances are she will come down on the same side as you. But up until the very crucial point, there's a lot that she's willing to do that more conventional heroes have never been willing to do. And a certain amount of inner torment, I think, always increases a character's popularity."

"Throughout the general atmosphere of evil in this series," Miller says, "we see an act of good take place, and we see Elektra's motives as ultimately being profoundly good. Even though she's a psychopathic bitch. She's always been a psychopathic bitch, but she's never been pure evil. She does many evil things in the course of this series, but the basic conflict in this series is one of good versus evil, and she's on the good side."

In the series, Miller continues, "moral issues are played out in an amoral situation. The idea behind the subjective approach" that Miller takes in the series, having Elektra, and Garrett narrate most of it, "is so we can see very many rotten things these people are thinking and doing. But through these people some good is achieved."

"This is something I think James M. Cain shows so beautifully in his work if you read it closely: that good and evil exist whether or not people are aware of them." In fact, Miller says, in some cases even psychopathic or corrupt people—like Elektra and Garrett—can have an underlying ability to them. "I think that's what makes her a painful character. There's no way you can condone what she does in any given story. But there is an underlying nobility. She's not as rotten as she wishes she was." (Miller compares this aspect of Elektra to the Batman's inability to carry out his intention to kill the Joker in *Dark Knight* #3.)

"Elektra always wants to be the worst human being who ever walked the face of the Earth." But her enemy, the demonic Beast, is far worse. "The Beast is literally out to destroy all life on the planet," Miller reveals. "She fights this, but she couches her reason for this in terms of personal revenge. That's not her true motive but it's the only one she can accept. Because Elektra doesn't believe in good. She doesn't believe in right."

Miller speaks of "taking a totally Dionysian approach to the characters." Working this enigmatic refer-

ence over in his mind, the interviewer suggested to Miller that Elektra and Barrett are Dionysian figures in that they are in the grip of strong passions. Indeed, these are passions, both sexual and violent, that society would not condone. Elektra and Garrett appear to be hearers of chaos. But their opponents in the series are Apollonian, figures of order and authority: a presidential candidate, an ambassador, agents of SHIELD, and even the Beast itself, who acts as a god to its followers. Yet these authority figures are the real bearers of chaos, out to destroy all life, while Elektra and Garrett, by opposing them, are chaotic figures ultimately working on behalf of order in its best sense.

Sienkiewicz describes her as a "pure force, a larger-than-life figure. I'm trying to shroud her in mystery, keeping her emotional range restrained." Sienkiewicz is depicting her much more realistically than he is the caricatured Garrett. "I'm trying not to show her eyes much. I want to keep her eyes in shadows, so the reader has to put things in there."

"I think it would be impossible to pin Elektra to the wall like a butterfly under glass," Miller says, referring to her enigmatic personality. "The character writes herself," he adds (and he says that Garrett now writes himself, as well). "She surprises me continually. Part of the discipline of writing the character is trying not to understand it too well. Because then you could end up with a character who'd just be all the things you wanted to push," no more than a pawn in the service of the author's opinions.

Garrett

"Originally," Miller recalls, "the concept of the series was that Elektra was going to move through different groups of people. She was going to be the one constant," while the cast of supporting characters would differ from issue to issue. "It was going to be essentially Elektra versus the Hand and the Beast." In issue two Elektra would have a run-in with a man named Garrett, who worked for Marvel's super-scientific intelligence agency SHIELD. At the end of that issue, Garrett would be dead.

But things didn't turn out that way. "Garrett was the big surprise," says Miller. "Garrett exploded as Bill and I tossed the character back and forth." The result is that SHIELD agent John Garrett has become the second most important character in

the series, and plays a major role in all but the initial issue.

Similarly, while Miller and Sienkiewicz were working on issue five, another seemingly minor character introduced in that issue, SHIELD agent Chastity McBride, likewise "exploded," revealing so much story potential that she became a major character in the series' final issues. Miller does not find it unusual that the course of the series has been changing so radically as he and Sienkiewicz have worked on it; in fact, he reports that *Dark Knight* has similarly evolved while he has been drawing and writing it through his conversations with his collaborator on that series, Lynn Varley. "It's entirely normal for me to be changing things constantly," Miller explains. "This is the way I like to work, with a lot of surprises along the way. If I could see everything mapped out in front of me, there wouldn't be any reason to do the piece."

"Garrett has been Bill's and my baby from the beginning," Miller continues. "I threw a very strange

"Garrett was the big surprise."

narration at him"—Garrett in issue two—"and he threw back at me a character who walks onto center stage and fills it. And we then proceed to make tons of Garrett jokes back and forth as he took shape, both of us getting a great deal of affection for this very ugly character."

On first seeing Garrett, with his Charles Bronson-like appearance and his large guns, readers might assume he is like the characters that Bronson and Sylvester Stallone play in films. So how does Garrett reflect the Rambo image? "Very clumsily," Miller replies, laughing. Garrett was originally designed by Miller and Sienkiewicz in part as a parody of what they regard as an ugly kind of machismo. Sienkiewicz greatly caricatures Garrett in his initial appearances in order to make his point. "He always looks as if he has shoulder pads from a football outfit on," Sienkiewicz comments. "He drinks too much, he smokes too much. The guns he uses are all phallic symbols. He can't stand the thought of using a small weapon."

Miller says, "Garrett is a male



Garrett.

fantasy figure" of machismo "who has to live in a world that includes women. In such a world, Miller comments, "that whole fantasy falls apart." The "other side" of Garrett, Miller goes on, is brought out through the strange relationship that evolves between himself and Elektra, who, Miller acknowledges, is herself a "dark male fantasy" figure, combining sex and violence.

At first Garrett is continually made to seem a fool by Elektra, and, Miller says, "feels a lot more like a clown than hero." But the relationship between Garrett and Elektra evolves into a strange kind of

alliance and even romance. "He goes from calling her a bitch to calling her honey and meaning it," Sienkiewicz states.

Moreover, as the series continues, Garrett is presented as a more admirable figure. "He changes so much," Sienkiewicz notes. "He started out being a real slob, a pig." But as the series goes on, Sienkiewicz dresses Garrett better and caricatures him less. In the more action-adventure-oriented issues of the series, Sienkiewicz states, "We're trying to show he's a very capable SHIELD agent." Miller adds, "You'll see when he's in

physical action that he's quite a powerhouse of a character."

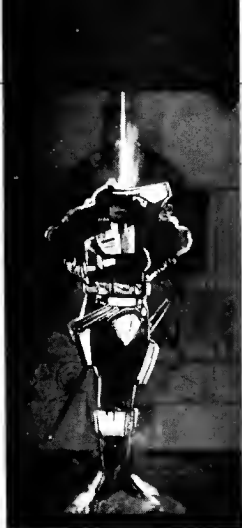
Like Elektra, Garrett also becomes a hero despite the darker side of himself. "Garrett is to a certain extent a hero," Miller states. "It takes most of the series for that to be revealed. He's in rebellion against Elektra in the late scripts. He is surrounded by forces that are much larger than he is. In spite of that, he does the right thing more often than he does the wrong thing, and he effects a great deal of good. He's a very ugly hero. He might do good for the right reasons: I just think it'd be in spite of the rest of his personality [laughs].

"I've been feeling lately that Garrett really is the reader's character" in the series, Miller contends. "He is the character through whom we really see the story." True, Garrett is self-obsessed, is somewhat corrupt, and subscribes to outdated concepts of manliness; nonetheless, he is relatively normal compared to most of what surrounds him in this series, which, Miller notes, "takes on Biblical proportions."

Chastity

Issue five of *Elektra: Assassin* introduces SHIELD agent Chastity McBryde, whom Jo Duffy calls a "very strong and marvelous character." Miller says, "Chastity is a corporate cop, essentially. She's a SHIELD agent who has some sort of past with Garrett," although while Miller knows what that past is, he is not at present planning to spell it out exactly in the series. However, Miller does say that Garrett's past relationship with Chastity parallels Elektra's past relationship with Matt Murdock. "Both of them [Elektra and Garrett] have had relationships that collapsed, to say the least," Miller states, "and were left with very bitter endings."

Just as Chastity's bright blonde mane contrasts with Elektra's black hair, so too, Miller says. "Chastity is very much the light to Elektra's dark" in terms of their roles in the series. "I felt the series needed that much balance," he adds. She is a heroic figure, "in terms of action, certainly," Miller goes on, but "in terms of morality, I think that's questionable along with everyone else's" in the series (except, presumably, Fury's). Chastity will prove to be more of an antagonist for Garrett than for Elektra. She is a highly dedicated SHIELD agent who hero-worships Nick Fury, abides strictly by the rules, and seems to have little tolerance for those who break them,



Chastity McBride.

as Garrett will.

Sienkiewicz describes Chastity as a "doe-eyed blonde bombshell. I see her as being a Catholic girl, who's very religious," despite the "glitzy" appearance Sienkiewicz says she gives herself. "It's the opposite of what she's really like. She's very moral. She'll be very fashionable, either very businesslike or very feminine in the way she looks." But, illustrating her strong religious sense, "she's going to have a cross hanging from her ear, the size of her fist, practically."

"Chastity is a late addition" to the series, Miller states. "It's a name I've been wanting to use for awhile. She evolved from a minor SHIELD character into one of the major forces in the series. Chastity and Perry command equal space [to Elektra's and Garrett's] in the last two issues. Issue seven is Chastity's issue. It involves all the characters, but it's the one where Chastity really gets played up. She narrates most of it."

"Chastity has just blossomed," Miller goes on. "She's just a wonderful character. She's not mean. She's very tough. She's very masculine, in the sense of her being a very dominant personality, very aggressive. I feel she's got all sorts of emotional reasons for being so tough."

"She's a very good human being," Miller asserts. Moreover, within the grim world of *Elektra: Assassin*, Chastity is a heroic figure because, Miller says, "she's a heroic bureaucrat. She's emmeshed in the day-to-day workings of SHIELD and she's

using them to do what she believes is right. She doesn't necessarily master the system but she uses it well enough, and she does what she thinks is the right thing with it."

"Chastity is as close to being objective as any character in the series. If you check her out scene by scene she doesn't do anything that shows the sort of narcissism at work with Elektra and Garrett. She may be the least narcissistic of the major characters, Fury excluded."

Nick Fury

Apart from Matt Murdock, who appears briefly in flashback in issue one, the only "classic" Marvel character who guest-stars in *Elektra: Assassin* is Colonel Nick Fury, SHIELD's Public Director, who, of course, starred in two Marvel series created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby: *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos*, portraying his wartime exploits, and *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD*.

Although *Elektra: Assassin* depicts a grim world that seems mostly to be without heroes as mainstream comics usually define them, Nick Fury is unchanged from his past Marvel appearances. "He's still absolutely Stan and Jack's character," Miller states.

However, Miller continues, "I'm showing a different side of [Fury's] world" than the one familiar to readers from past Nick Fury stories. "The whole *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* world makes for great adventure comics that Lee and Kirby did, but it doesn't really reflect much of how I understand the world to work. I've learned a little too much about government organizations to think that all of SHIELD could run that well or that justly no matter who's in charge."

Personally fighting HYDRA and other foes, as Fury did in his own stories, "is what he does in his spare time," Miller contends. In *Elektra: Assassin*, "Fury is tremendously competent, as much of a good guy as he's ever been. But he's got a good deal more on his hands than has ever been shown before. This isn't a Nick Fury who puts on a jumpsuit and goes out to fight spies. This is a man who's managing a monstrous technological spy organization. He spends half his time on the telephone with senators trying to get funding."

"Fury is ultimately a bureaucrat. I think once any organization reaches a certain size, it becomes kind of a monster, and no matter what the intentions of the people working in it, it can no longer follow any kind of creative vision. It



"Nick Fury is unchanged from his past Marvel appearances."

becomes what I refer to as a bureaucracy."

SHIELD has become so huge that Fury himself is not aware of everything going on within the organization, and, Miller asks, "How could he?" The section of SHIELD in Latin America for which Garrett and Perry work is operating in ways that Fury would not condone at all. During the course of the series, Fury turns his attention to Elektra's activities, and readers will see what happens as Fury learns about some of the amoral activities being conducted by a SHIELD division called Extetchop.

Perry

The *Elektra* series has various human villains. Two, Ambassador Reich and presidential candidate Ken Wind, are pawns of the demonic Beast who appears in the first issue. Sienkiewicz sees Wind (whose name is pronounced "wind" as in air, not as in winding a clock, as his political campaign commercials keep telling us in the series) as "very much of a Kennedy parody."

All proceeding
as planned.

She's out of
her mind.

Wild pinks coming



soon...

with that boy-next-door attractiveness." As for Reich, Sienkiewicz compares him to Kurt Waldheim (the Austrian politician recently revealed to have had a Nazi past) or "like Melvin Belli gone awry, very distinguished-looking, but pretty reprehensible."

One of the other principal villains of the series will be Garrett's former colleague at SHIELD, Arthur Perry, who debuts in issue two. "Garrett is pure glamor compared to Perry," Miller states. "Perry is an out-and-out sociopathic son of a bitch."

"Perry's a wiseass," says Sienkiewicz. "He's like Eddie Haskell, but he's a real punk, who's just nasty, who makes Garrett look like Henry Fonda in some respects. Perry's just venal, really evil, malicious, nauseating. A punk who delights in being a punk. The first time I showed him I made him into a real geek, with a really malicious grin, a gold tooth, really new wave punk shades. I'm trying to make him as new wave as possible."

Also, in designing Perry's appearance, Sienkiewicz states, "Because Garrett was so big and brawny, I wanted a character playing opposite him to be thin and emaciated, and also a lot more psychotic." Perry somewhat resembles another slender Miller-Sienkiewicz villain, the murderous Victor from their forthcoming *Daredevil* graphic novel. Sienkiewicz finds "there's something about" doing villains who do not conform to the idea of a menace being physically large. "Victor is menacing and frightening, but he's not large. He's not big, he's not powerful. He's a little tiny guy on the street whose eyes don't look in the same direction at the same time, chameleon eyes, little beady eyes. And I think behind those shades, Perry's got the same look, that sort of psychotic look. I really like doing things where what makes the villain so frightening is not his physical size, but the stuff that goes on behind the eyes. That's what I'm trying to do with Perry."

The eyes are also important in Sienkiewicz's depiction of another character in the series, Sandy, who plays her part in issue four. "Sandy's been in a coma for years," Sienkiewicz explains, and she finally comes out of it in that issue. In depicting this young girl, Sienkiewicz says, "I was trying to get across this incredible doe-eyed innocence. She is just so vulnerable, it's unbelievable." When she comes out of her coma and "her eyes are open, they're the size of tea saucers. She's a walking

Walter Keane painting."

Surrealism in Comics

"*Elektra: Assassin* is the most consciously surreal series I've ever worked on," asserts Miller. Told of Miller's statement, Sienkiewicz responded, "That's perfect! That's exactly the way I'm going with it. He and I hadn't even discussed that explicitly, but that pretty much hits the nail on the head. There's a real surreality to the stuff the shifting realities and the shifting techniques, for one thing, lapsing into more complex visuals at times. Throwing a realistic situation around a figure who's improbable, or very realistic figures against the Beast."

The surreality of the series is difficult to define. To say that the series is surreal is not to say that it is inaccessible as a readable narrative. Jo Duffy says, "I think the work is surreal for the characters. By its excellence it communicates a very linear story though it does not do it in a linear way. The story is straightforward and direct, but it's communicated with tremendous sophistication. The principal characters, Elektra and Garrett, are undergoing very surreal experiences as they go through this adventure, and so the context is somewhat surreal, but its communication is very, very explicit."

Still, the visual presentation of this series differs sharply from that of other mainstream comic books, and even radically from Sienkiewicz's past published work in comics. First, though, let us define our terms: surrealism, according to one definition, is "the principles, ideals, or practice of producing fantastic or incongruous imagery or effects in art, literature, or theater by means of unnatural juxtapositions and combinations."

Here are a few examples from *Elektra* of Miller-Sienkiewicz surrealism. In issue three, Garrett is operated on for injuries he suffered in the previous installment. Sienkiewicz suggested, and Miller agreed, to have one of the surgical instruments be a Singer sewing machine.

In the shot in which Elektra meets the demonic Beast, Sienkiewicz has Elektra's father there. When Elektra thinks about when her mother was pregnant with her, we are shown a picture of Elektra's mother with the baby visible within her. A shot of Elektra's father, lying dead and covered with blood, is accompanied by childlike scrawls of writing. These three examples are all from

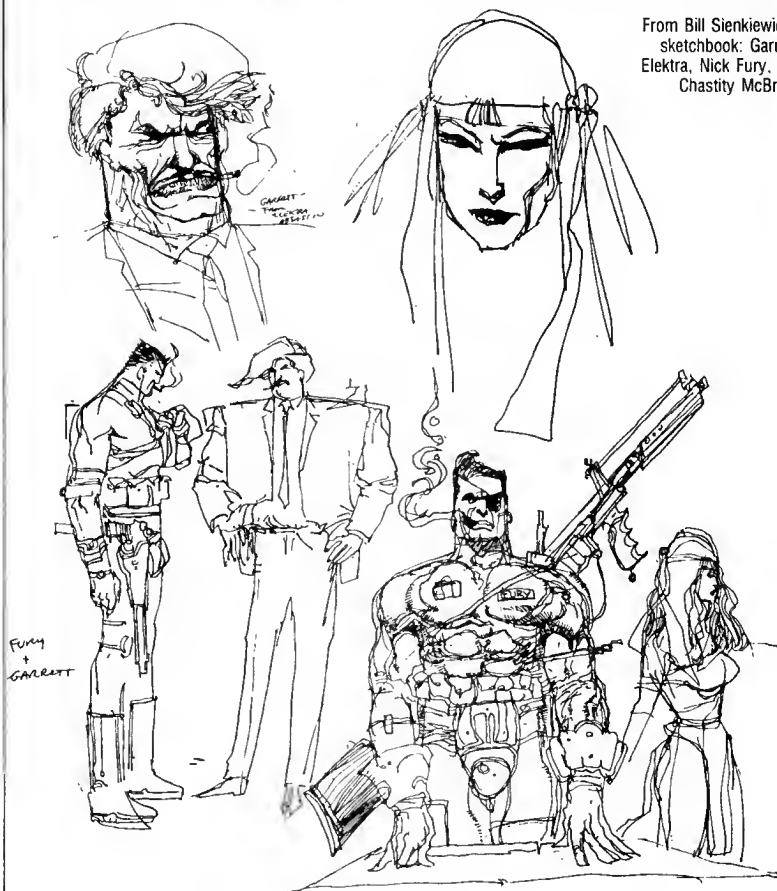
the series' first issue, which Miller describes as an astonishing "explosion" on Sienkiewicz's part. In this issue Sienkiewicz uses a wide variety of styles. In one shot of the interior of the asylum in which Elektra is confined, for example, every other woman there seems to be a lookalike for her, as if her miserable fate is being repeated dozens of times, or perhaps indicating that the asylum is depriving her and the other inmates of their individuality.

Sienkiewicz does not range so widely in artistic style in the subsequent issues, but he still achieves unusual effects throughout. Realistically drawn characters, like Elektra and Chastity, interact with highly

caricatured ones, like Garrett and Perry. One of Sienkiewicz's most startling coups is his visualization of the presidential candidate Ken Wind. "I'm treating him like a cardboard cutout," Sienkiewicz says. "He's only got two expressions: one is grim determination or reserve, and the other is that damn smile they all have. He's always trying to put his best side forward," and so Sienkiewicz intends always to show his face looking directly forward, no matter what position his body is in. "So he looks like an owl," Sienkiewicz comments, referring to that bird's ability to turn its head almost completely around. "I'll be breaking all

the laws of physics with him, but that's fine with me. It'll probably look very bizarre but I think it'll make a definite statement, which is what I think the whole series is doing."

None of the unusual visualizations are being done without a reason. As Sienkiewicz's discussion of Ken Wind indicates, these effects are being used as a means of commenting upon the characters and the actions. This is what Sienkiewicz meant in his recent *Comics Journal* interview when he spoke of doing illustrations for *Elektra* in counterpoint to the words in Miller's full script: he is not always doing a straight, simple visualization of



From Bill Sienkiewicz's sketchbook: Garrett, Elektra, Nick Fury, and Chastity McBride.

CHARLTON ALREADY HAS AN ANIMAL (ATOMIC MOUSE), ADVENTURE
(THANE, YANG), A BIRD (LARRY), KID (LI), GENIUS, GHOST
(TIMM), FRODO, AVE'S, PROF. R (THE
COFF AND

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what Miller calls for, but using visuals to comment upon it, to interpret it. "Frank's going pretty much straightforward with his writing," Sienkiewicz says, "and what I'm doing with the visuals is saying, OK, let's see how far I can push this."

Miller loves what Sienkiewicz has come up with. "I think the absolute explosion of the first issue was just a shock to me from top to bottom," he says. "It was certainly not what I had pictured when I was working on the script. It's such diversity, so adventurous, so bold. The script from its inception was heading in that surreal direction," but now, because of the visuals, the series has taken on much more of a surreal tone. Miller sees what Sienkiewicz is doing as showing a willingness to forgo pure realism, although, "when it's realistic, it's much more realistic than superhero comics tend to be. I think what we've got here is a lot of what Bill's had inside him, waiting to get out. Bill's approach is generally non-linear, generally a somewhat poetic approach to narrative, and I think that would be a hard thing to accommodate in a monthly pulp comic," which *Elektra* is not. For example, Miller finds it altogether appropriate that Sienkiewicz caricatures Garrett so much in drawing him, since Miller intends Garrett to be in part, a parody machismo figure. "Bill makes him look totally preposterous. I love it!"

In contrast to the usual "Marvel style" of working, in which the writer first does a plot for the artist, and scripts the story after it has been drawn, Miller does a full script first, complete with dialogue and descriptions of each panel, for *Elektra* as well as his other projects. (Sienkiewicz can vary the panel breakdown if he wishes.) After Sienkiewicz draws the pages, Miller will make changes in the script, both to clarify matters further and to make any changes appropriate to Sienkiewicz's unusual visualizations. For example, in issue one, for the scene in which Elektra murders a victim who is riding a merry-go-round, Miller added a number of lines, mostly sentence fragments, to create a verbal rhythm that he says felt appropriate to the scene as it now looked. "I found as I was writing to Bill's pictures, a certain kind of almost-blank verse started happening that felt like the perfect verbal counterpoint to the pictures. So in many cases," like this murder scene, "I fragmented the narrative further." Miller adds that this is an example of how *Elektra*



Elektra's father is shot.

"bringing things out of me that I've never done before."

Until he saw Miller's changes in the script, Sienkiewicz was worried that he had gone too far in illustrating the first issue. He had felt, he says, "indecision about how to do it," leading to the first issue's various different styles, and "I was nervous that with all the different styles it would not pull together." But when Sienkiewicz saw how Miller, after seeing the pages himself, had re-scripted the issue, Sienkiewicz felt "all of a sudden the styles coalesced, and it became an entity. He wrote for the different styles and it pulled together." Sienkiewicz believes that in issue one, "I was sort of playing counterpoint to Frank" by, to an extent, opposing the images to the words, and that there is less of the counterpoint effect in later issues, although Sienkiewicz does not rule out doing it again still later in the series.

Sienkiewicz believes that mainstream comics puts too much emphasis on making everything look realistic; upon visual continuity. "There's plenty of continuity in *Elektra*," he says, "but it's a continuity of the surreal. It'll all make sense; it'll hang together." The reality he portrays in this series is not one of external appearances in every case. "It's an internal reality, a reality of emotions," Sienkiewicz has said in the past that he draws things more based on the way they feel to him than they way they look. In *Elektra* he has carried that principle much further than he has in his previously published comics work.

Unreliable Narrators

There is another reason for much of

the unrealistic artistic style used in *Elektra*. There is no omniscient authorial narrator in *Elektra: Assassin*. Instead, most of the series is narrated by the two main characters, Elektra and Garrett themselves. Hence, reality is often portrayed as one of them envisions it, or, more specifically, as Sienkiewicz and Miller dramatize each character's perception of it. Hence, for example, Elektra's memories of her past life in issue one are not necessarily literally true. Miller has written those flashbacks in the way that Elektra, who at that time has a clouded memory, recalls them. Moreover, Sienkiewicz then portrays those flashbacks in a manner suggesting a young child's perceptions of such events, thereby making his own commentary, visually, on Elektra's state of mind as she reminisces. "On occasion," Sienkiewicz says, the way in which reality is pictured "becomes very subjective for the narrator." In the sequence in which Elektra recalls her father's bloody death, "I was trying to distance her from the brutality of it by having it look very childlike."

The reader must thus keep in mind that the manner in which either Elektra or Garrett perceives reality is not necessarily objectively true. Miller points to Akira Kurosawa's film, *Rashomon*, in which the same event is portrayed several times, each time radically different, from the perspective of a different witness. Speaking of *Elektra: Assassin*, Miller then says, "Imagine *Rashomon* done featuring only characters whose sanity was in question." In *Elektra* one is "trying to construct what is happening here through undependable and self-obsessed narrators."

"Something I felt a number of times while working on this story," Miller says, "is that most superhero stories are narcissistic power fantasies. *Elektra* really is the same thing, only I'm not treating the narcissism as such a positive thing. The two leads of this series are completely self-obsessed, and are very dark, destructive figures for that. Reality is hard to find in this series. It is hard to find for a true narcissist."

The story of *Elektra: Assassin*, Jo Duffy says, can indeed easily be followed. "The pictures are very, very exciting, and beautiful to follow. You can look at every page and tell what is going on in the pictures without ever having seen the script." But the exact interpretation of the events in the story may be another matter. "The illustrations

are not really illustrations of what's going on," Miller says. "The narration isn't really describing what's going on, either. There's a gap there, and somewhere in that gap is reality. Reality has to be inferred by the reader: it's not offered up."

Elektra as Dark Comedy

Despite the violence and even horror to be found in *Elektra: Assassin*, Miller and Sienkiewicz have both referred to the series as a comedy, with Sienkiewicz going so far as to compare the early issues with Garrett to Chuck Jones's Roadrunner cartoons. Told of Sienkiewicz's comparison, Miller laughs and says, "There's a certain part of the story, issues two and three in particular, in which Elektra and Garrett do very much play Roadrunner and Wile E. Coyote." Despite Garrett's attempts to capture the uncatchable Elektra, she escapes and he ends up looking like a fool, his plans having backfired on him. Also, Miller notes, there is some fairly wild use of machinery later on, as when Garrett rides a rocket sled to capture a helicopter in issue five. "It takes on a Kirbysque quality, I think," reflects Miller, "but I don't argue with Bill's reference to Chuck Jones."

But readers should not search *Elektra* for Looney Tunes-style laughs by any means. When Miller and Sienkiewicz call *Elektra* a comedy, they mean it is a very grim, dark, ironic comedy, though not without strange sources of laughter. Asked if *Elektra*'s humor is more laughter-provoking or grimly ironic, Miller replied, "Most of it is the latter, but there are places in it where if everything Bill and I are doing together works as well as I think it will, you may find yourself laughing out loud without knowing why."

Miller compares the dark humor of *Elektra* to that which he finds in the film work of Martin Scorsese, and in particular in Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, which, like *Elektra*, deals with violence and insanity. "There is humor in *Taxi Driver*," Miller asserts. "Everything that goes on in the film between Cybill Shepherd and Robert De Niro is fascinating, because the characters are so self-obsessed. Reality is what we're seeing on the screen but neither of the two characters we see is living it. He has constructed an image of her that has nothing to do with her except her physical appearance. And she cannot comprehend the world he's living in. And there are a number of moments that are very unpleasantly comic, I think such as when



Garrett finds three people who "got the joke."

he takes her to the porn theater."

To a large extent the dark humor of *Elektra: Assassin* lies in subtleties and subtext. Irony in fiction has been defined as a mode in which characters are manipulated by forces far larger than they are, which they cannot fight successfully, and are doomed to defeats lacking in tragic grandeur, but bearing perhaps a certain absurdity. In portions of *Elektra* we see the odd effect created when this ironic mode takes over the usual comic book world of larger-than-life heroism. Garrett is manipulated and humiliated by Elektra, and his fate, however degrading and even horrible it may be at times, is intended by Miller and Sienkiewicz to have more than a touch of the absurd to it. Garrett, Miller says, "falls somewhere between being a hero and a clown. He feels a lot more like a clown than a hero." Miller points to the Westerns of filmmaker Sergio Leone: "There is a very bleak, ironic, somewhat comic view of the world that runs through them. In *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, for instance, all three characters contain all three aspects"—none of the

three is either all hero or all villain—and all of them are to a certain extent pawns."

Yet, if the reader properly attunes himself to the spirit behind *Elektra: Assassin*, he will find genuinely laugh-provoking moments as well, and more frequently as the series progresses. "There are a number of funny lines throughout," Miller says, "particularly from Garrett. In particular, there are some really funny lines in issue four." There is also much intentional humor in Sienkiewicz's enthusiastic caricaturing of characters like Garrett, Sandy, and Ken Wind. Much of the humor comes out of the evolving romance between Elektra and Garrett. (The ironically comic romance between two killers in John Huston's most recent film, *Prizzi's Honor*, has been suggested as an analogue.) Readers should watch out for the endings of issues three and five, Sandy's sexual fantasies in issue four, and Sienkiewicz's flabbergasting valentine-style cover featuring Elektra and Garrett for one of the later issues.

Politics and Comics

Strong political themes have run throughout Frank Miller's recent comics work, to an extent that has not been seen in mainstream comic books since the early 1970s. The Batman's vigilantism is an explicitly political issue in the *Dark Knight* series. American involvement in the political turmoil in Nicaragua is explicitly depicted in Miller's recent run on *Daredevil*, and the subject turns up in thinly disguised form in both *Dark Knight* and *Elektra*. The SHIELD of *Elektra: Assassin* is a super-technological version of the CIA, and the South American SHIELD division depicted in the series is "behaving pretty disreputably," in Miller's words. The President of the United States is a character in both *Dark Knight* and *Elektra: Assassin*. In *Knight* he is clearly a parody of Ronald Reagan, while in *Elektra*, Sienkiewicz creates a portrayal that amazingly and humorously visually blends Reagan with Richard Nixon.

Why has Miller decided to deal so much with political themes? "It seems kinds of obvious. Politics has always been part of cartooning, but mostly it's been in single-page illustrations," the standard political cartoons. But some comics artists have done highly political work, such as Walt Kelly's *Pogo* and Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury*. "Garry Trudeau's work has had a lot to do

with my moving in this direction," Miller notes.

Miller's turn to political themes "has a lot to do with my becoming more involved outside of myself than I used to be," he says. "It also has to do with my looking for a stronger link between reality and fantasy in my work. Comics of any kind can serve a social purpose. I don't mean that we are doing stories that are supposedly set in the real world; it seems inevitable that we give them a political context." The superhero fantasy takes on more power and believability, Miller thinks, if it is set within a recognizable and credible social and political context. "In order for superhero stories to have any power, he contends, "they've got to be rooted in something that is real, whether it's psychological or sexual or political or whatever. Particularly with the desperate shape comics are in now, it's time to re-evaluate and rethink things, the way I've been doing a lot of reevaluating and rethinking in terms of their political context."

Miller believes his use of political themes "is a consequence of comics starting to be written for older readers." But, he asserts, comic books had political contexts from the 1930s through the 1950s. "The most important superheroes ever created, Superman and Batman, had a political context at the beginning, especially Superman," who fought on behalf of the common man, even against war-mongering leaders. "It's hard to believe now," Miller says, "but Superman began as anything but what you'd classify as a right-wing hero. I think simple neglect caused political contexts in superhero comics to evaporate. Even in the 1970s when politics came into comic books, while there was some very good work, generally it came in as one of several fads that comics went through."

"I guess the best reason I can give for this," his use of political themes, "is something Sting said recently—I'm paraphrasing—that this is not a time to party, it's a time to be serious, because we live in very dark times. And we do. We live in very threatening times, very dangerous times. I want there to be some relationship between the world and my work. I don't want to do escapist fantasies. I hate the word 'escapist' almost as much as I hate the words 'role model.' I think historically cartoonists have had a wonderful role in society [as political commentators] and that should be reasserted as much as possible."

Like *Dark Knight*, *Elektra: Assassin* sharply criticizes both 1960s-style liberals and the conservatives now in charge of the government, as well as the big bureaucratic governmental structure itself. Miller asserts that "the object of a cartoonist" is indeed to criticize both sides of the mainstream political scene. "It seems to me that part of the role of the cartoonist is to pick the holes in what is going on. Things are extremely silly right now. The Democratic party is stuck in the 1960s and the Republican party is struggling through the late 1940s."

In doing political commentary through the cartoon medium, Miller sees his role being one of criticizing, but not necessarily of offering solutions. "A cartoonist is in many ways a critic," he states. "There are two dangers to this: to become a cynic or to become an ideologue."

whole career over. And I think that for Bill, working is frequently like starting his career over, too, because his imagination is so volatile. Neither of us independently of each other could have done anything like this," Miller says of *Elektra: Assassin*. Miller regards the series as very much a product of both his and Sienkiewicz's personalities. "Bill and I are very different and it comes through. We play off each other; it used to feel as if we were having a volleyball game," shooting ideas back and forth. "Now it's more like a tennis match: it's speeded up. Our work goes a lot of dimension because of the two personalities at work on it."

Miller's use of subjective narration by the characters rather than an objective omniscient narrator has a lot to do with the fact that he is working with Sienkiewicz. The



From *Elektra* #4: Garrett has a run-in with a member of "The Hand."

An ideologue, Miller says, "represents a point of view and ignores all the facts that contradict it. I'd rather have a point of view than an ideology: a point of view is more personal, more flexible. One of the joys of doing *Dark Knight* was pointing out all the different sides of the issues that I could."

"I can't really call myself a liberal or a conservative politically. I've seen Walter Mondale and Ronald Reagan. I'm not willing to attach myself to any particular movement or cause for the present."

The Art of Collaboration

Speaking of his collaboration with Sienkiewicz, Miller states, "Working with Bill is like starting my

Daredevil graphic novel they have done together is also narrated by its characters. "From the beginning," Miller says, "I felt that what Bill and I had to do was work that was essentially subjective. The first script that I wrote with him in mind," which became the *Daredevil* graphic novel, "was a completely subjective narrative. When I look at Bill's pictures, I feel that coming in with an omniscient narrator would destroy what the pictures are conveying."

Working with Sienkiewicz has changed a number of Miller's ideas about comics storytelling. "The thing that frightened me at first in working with Bill is that I have always thought of the pictures as being essentially more objective

than the words. Working with Bill, I've found that the opposite is quite often the case. He caught me completely off guard with the first *Elektra*. A story that I had visualized in fairly straightforward terms became this amazing subjective graphic. It brought on a lot of re-writing, and a lot of better writing, I think. And the final product is a lot more challenging.

"I often find in working with Bill that the pictures are doing what I generally expect the words to do. In response, I'm making the words do what I generally make the pictures do. An example would be the scene in *Elektra* #1 where she's being hosed down with the other women." From the pictures alone "you can feel how cold she is and how demeaning and horrible this situation is." Hence, Miller believed it was unnecessary to describe her situation in a caption, and instead used the captions for Elektra to voice her thoughts about something entirely different. "So in the script I was able to play total counterpoint to it." It is then up to the reader to make what he will out of the fact that Elektra chooses to think of these things while undergoing this demeaning experience. Such a technique helps give the series its multiple levels of meaning.

Miller believes that his collaboration with Sienkiewicz has influenced both men's attitudes towards storytelling. He sees Sienkiewicz doing Miller-style staging in sequences later in the series. As for himself, Miller points to the shot of the Batman holding the general's corpse in *Dark Knight* #2. "That scene never would have happened if I hadn't been working with Bill." Miller asserts. "Bill and I come from completely different ends of the Earth as far as comics go. Bill's orientation is that of an illustrator, and I've gotten the idea of a single illustration encapsulating an event from him. It's another way comics can work."

Miller sums up, "Working with Bill is a very intense process of discovery. It's as pure a collaboration as I can imagine."

The Experiment

Looking over the first issue of *Elektra, Assassin* now that it is out, Miller says, "I'm amazed at how well everything pulled together. The seamlessness of it really surprises me."

But how does he think much of the readership will react? "My guess is that the first reaction will be one

of shock. It doesn't look like comics that people are used to." Subsequent issues will become more "linear" in their storytelling, Miller and Sienkiewicz say, as the story becomes more action-oriented, although Miller hopes to shake up readers' expectations with the last issue in the series as much as and perhaps more than the first issue did.

"Bill and I are not being deliberately obscure," Miller explains. "There's a method to our madness. We're working towards the most effective way to get our story across. I believe that any piece of work should communicate. But to make comics storytelling follow a regimen is to paralyze the form when it's barely been born. Holding to the old methods will do nothing but give you a vehicle for clichés."

Asked about the recent publicity that he and *Dark Knight* have received in *Rolling Stone* and elsewhere in the press, Miller comments, "There's a change in perception going on about comics, and I'm being used as an example of that. People are starting to play with the form. People are starting to write richer material, material for older readers. I think that if new people are picking up comics, it's because cartoonists are actually thinking about their work."

"People are starved for something to look at. In every field of entertainment, this is an amazingly low period. Hollywood in particular seems to have decided that people are total idiots."

"I think that comics by their nature are almost an underground form. It's a very private experience to read a comic book." A comics artist works in a personal style. "At its best, cartooning is a very direct way of writing with pictures. It also is an almost private communication between the artist and the reader, because the reader is doing so much of the work of making the story. It's very intimate because your eyes are interpreting lines and making them into an entire experience. Look at *Peanuts*: that's a beautiful cartoon. Each one of those characters is hristling with personality. Most of them consist of little more than five lines. We make Charlie Brown; Charles Schulz just gives us blueprints."

"I think with comic books proclaiming themselves garbage for all the world to hear, the comics themselves got less and less personal, less and less dramatic, less relevant to anything going on."

"But I think there's been a recent opening in people's minds about comics. There's been enough good work

that's been out that's challenged the conventions of the form—Alan Moore's stuff in particular—that has shown people if they're willing to work a little harder when they're reading the comics, they're likely to get more out of them. The work Bill's doing right now is extraordinary, but it does take a bit more work to follow as a narrative."

"I think of comics right now as being very much in the state rock and roll was in at the time of Elvis Presley and Patsy Cline, having stayed still in the water for a time, an upheaval is starting, where various different isolated factions are colliding with each other," to produce better work than before.

So Miller wishes to tell people who started reading the *Elektra: Assassin* series to "stick with it, because I think the rewards are there. I think people have really got to open their minds about what comics can be. We're talking about this amazingly versatile form. We're talking about nothing more than the combination of words and pictures in all the different ways that that can work. There's an amazing number of things that can be done, and finally the stuff is starting to happen in the center of the comics market."

"*Elektra* feels a lot like *Ronin* to me. It's brand new territory. It's territory worth exploring, but it's very demanding work. It demands a lot of the readers." Comparing *Elektra* to *Dark Knight*, Miller declares that "In terms of the use of the form, *Elektra* is by far the holder of the two. The goals of the two projects are very, very different. I think that *Elektra* is the most genuinely experimental thing I've ever worked on in terms of the form itself, and that's including *Ronin*. I think *Elektra*'s an attempt at something brand new. In terms of experimentation, it's at least equal to the effort in *Ronin*. *Dark Knight* is more of a synthesis: it's more of an attempt to take everything comics have been doing and to push it all further. *Elektra*'s a brand-new animal." ●

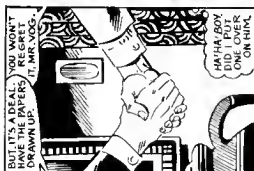




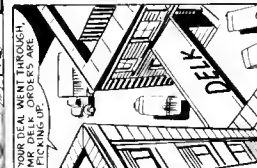
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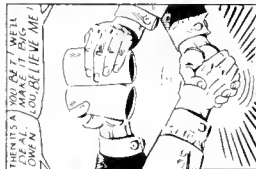
After the conclusion of the three-part *Ditko's World*, Ditko's unique work can still be found in the pages of *Renegade's Murder*—as in this chiller from issue #2. *Murder* is a three-part black-and-white series edited by Robin Snyder (who also edited *Ditko's World* and *Murder*), and it premieres in August.



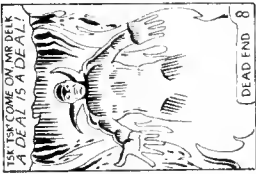
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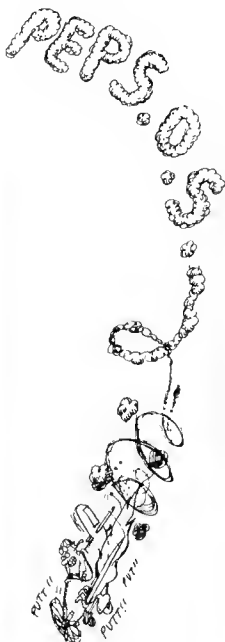
Sergio Aragones

By Peter Bosch

Thanks to the people of the Victoria International Cartoon Festival and Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Victoria for making Sergio available for an interview. Thanks also to Patrick Shaughnessy of Golden Age Collectibles in Vancouver, B.C., for letting me interview Sergio while he was signing autographs in his store. And, of course, a tremendous thank you to Sergio himself.

The dry facts: Sergio Aragones Domenech was born in Castellon, Spain, in 1937. His father, a film producer, moved the family to Mexico City where Sergio grew up, finally studying architecture at the Universidad Nacional de Mexico. He moved to the U.S. and his cartoons have appeared in *Mad*, *Plop* and *Groo*, among others, in addition to being seen on *Laugh-In* and TV's *Bloopers & Practical Jokes*.

The fun facts: Sergio Aragones is an entertaining one-man show. He is a man of what seems to be limitless energy, humor and patience. He is a success at his chosen craft and a great hit with everyone he meets. During the one-and-a-half hours he was at Golden Age Collectibles, he cheerfully answered every question put to him by a long line of fans (many of who were skipping out of school to meet him) and autographed comic after comic as they



were thrust before him, each with a quick sketch of *Groo*. The thing of it is, he was having as much fun as the fans. The time sped by and everyone, including Aragones, was sorry it was over, but he still had interviews on radio and television stations in the city to do that day before heading over to the convention in Victoria. One almost pities him when one thinks about the thousands of fans who will throng to him...but, knowing Sergio, he'll love it.

AMAZING HEROES: *You were studying architecture in school. How did you move on to cartooning?*

SERGIO ARAGONES: I didn't move into cartooning. I was cartooning all my life, since I was a kid. The only difference is that when you want to become a professional, eventually, in Mexico it is very hard to make a living as a cartoonist. As long as I was going to school, I could stay home and eat. So I had a chance to do my cartooning on the side. But I was a cartoonist all the time. I was doing cartoons for the school and high school...for the newspaper in college. The parents in our type of society wanted their son to be a professional because it was very important. A cartoonist is never something to be, because there

is no remuneration in it. They don't want their son to be a pauper, so they don't want him to be a cartoonist.

AH: *My father didn't want me to be a writer for the same reason.*

ARAGONES: Yes, same thing. They want you to go out and get a normal job.

AH: *What were your inspirations as a child?*

ARAGONES: Oh, they were the movies, animated cartoons. We had

enced me a little. The Donald Duck stories, definitely.

AH: *Carl Barks?*

ARAGONES: Carl Barks. They were so perfectly crafted. They had a beginning, an end, a punchline. They were superb. I thought they were the best.

AH: *Was there ever a time when you made a decision about your art, going into serious work as opposed to cartooning?*

ARAGONES: No. I never studied

with?

ARAGONES: Oh, yes, like Steinberg.

AH: *Looking at your work, I've noticed that everything has a lot of motion to it.*

ARAGONES: That has a lot to do with my being an active person. I have done a lot of sports. Then, in college, I was part of an arts group and I discovered pantomime. That was an enormous change in my career. This was a craft that knew exactly all the movements of the body without having to say a word, which is what I had been doing with cartoons all my life. So, suddenly, I had something I could do physically to understand the movement. And I had a great teacher: Alexandro Jodorowsky, who writes for *Heavy Metal*. Jodorowsky is one of the [most] excellent mimes ever. He worked with Marcel Marceau for many years. He's an excellent writer, a very avant-garde guy and an excellent teacher. He directed a classic movie called *El Topo*, and also *Holy Mountain*. And when he came and opened a school of pantomime in Mexico, there I was. Not to become a mime, because I was heavy and hulky, but to understand movement which I applied to my cartoons.

AH: *Did you ever think about going into acting?*

ARAGONES: No. My father was a movie producer and I could have. Oh, I was a child actor and worked in a few of his movies, but just for the added income, not because I wanted to. I don't like it as a career. When you grow up in film, you don't see it as that big attraction to become a star. You see how hard they work and the fact they have to go to locations. I don't want that type of life. But you can see a movie right now called *To Kill A Stranger*, with Aldo Ray and Donald Pleasence, and I'm the villain in it. It was shot in Mexico. It's now on cassette. But it's a very bad movie. I'll do it for my friends, but that is not my career.

AH: *Weren't you in another movie?*

ARAGONES: Yes, you saw me in *Norman, Is That You?*, with Pearl Bailey and Redd Foxx. And I was on *Laugh-In*. I was the general and the painter. But that was a lot of fun.

AH: *How did the move to the U.S. come about?*

ARAGONES: Cartoonists in Mexico get paid proportionately to the magazines' circulation, and the magazines in Mexico have very small circulations. So they pay very little. When I found out how much cartoonists made in the United States, that was that. I decided I'd



complete shows just of cartoons. And daily comic strips. I had the advantage that in Mexico you get cartoons not only from the United States, you get them from Argentina, which has a very strong history of comic strips, and we'd get a lot of comics from Spain and magazine cartoons from Europe. All of them interested me and I guess all of them influenced me a little.

AH: *What about major illustrators?*

ARAGONES: Major? Stylewise, I would say the cartoons of (Saul) Steinberg were very modern, and Virgil Partch. I was very impressed by them. And a Mexican cartoonist called Quezada, and the Argentine cartoonist called Oski, sensational cartoons. All these people influ-

art. I never cared to do it, I love fine art and I've read about it, but only as general culture. I never intended to do it. The only doubts I had were when I was in college. All my friends were very avant-garde in the theatre and avant-garde in literature and avant-garde in poetry, and I thought maybe I wanted to be an avant-garde cartoonist. And I was doing these very sketchy cartoons without a punchline, but they were very fine—like a Steinberg-type of thing. I was very uncomfortable. All my friends thought it was terrific. It was a little simpler, lines were continuous. I grew up in the '50s, so that was their style—but I didn't like it. So that didn't last long.

AH: *Did you imitate others to begin*

go there and check it out. I was very fortunate that my material was accepted, and so I stayed. A lot of people think that when I went to *Mad* [in 1962], I was a new cartoonist, but I'd already been a cartoonist for ten years.

AH: What were some of the other magazines in the U.S. that you've done work for?

ARAGONES: *Gourmet*, the *Post*, *True*, *Escapade*.

AH: How did the *Mad* work start?

ARAGONES: I went with my portfolio to the magazine and they saw it and liked it. They made two pages out of it, "A Mad Look at Astronauts," and after that they said, "Bring more." The next day, I was there with another article. Then another one, then the marginals.

AH: I remember having to read *Mad* twice. Once for the stories and the second time for your border drawings, the "marginals."

ARAGONES: Well, imagine the people who bought it for ten years and never saw the marginals that were there.

AH: You've run across people like that?

ARAGONES: Yes, I found a guy who collected it and read a few articles. Don Martin and things like that... and one day he's reading it more carefully and sees the gags. So back to another issue, finds another. He goes crazy because he has to go back through his whole collection to start reading them.

AH: Do you ever plan certain gags based on knowing where on the page they will go?

ARAGONES: No, I send them the pages and then they cut them out and paste them up wherever they feel like it.

AH: You've gotten a reputation as being the fastest cartoonist in the world. And I can well believe it. Watching you do sketches here for the fans, it takes you no longer to do a drawing of Groo than it does for you to sign your name to it. When it comes to actual comic work, how long does an average page take you? Say, something like Groo?

ARAGONES: It all depends. I'm fast when I have to do a show in front of an audience. Sure, I'm fast, because it's already planned, it's very well executed. I've been doing it all my life. I know where everything goes. So I draw Alfred E. Neuman in a few seconds... but that has nothing to do with the practical application of work. When I work on a page, I spend much more time. And not only drawing. I have

to research, I have to layout, I have to do all sorts of stuff. The speed on the drawing helps because it's loose. If I had to draw realistically, I'd be much slower. I spend much more time drawing a catapult than one of my characters.

AH: Like in *Asterix*, with all the finely detailed buildings in the background?

ARAGONES: Well, the Europeans have a different work method. I have

for the war comic we're doing." They gave me a piece of paper and said, "Let's start." They clocked it. I got an idea, pencilled it, went to the research room, got some of the uniforms, finished it... and it took 35 minutes. But it was a three-panel page, only two soldiers, and it was a very simple gag. Groo can take me two days for one page.

AH: Do you have a set working schedule?



to publish a comic book a month. On *Asterix*, they had to do two pages every week to publish in a weekly magazine, and when all the pages were completed, they'd make a book. I do the book first: I have to do 22 pages and a cover every month. So I have to do a page a day, no matter what. I can do it very comfortably, but a two-page spread takes me longer, so I don't do it all at once. I do a little, then I go back to my work, do more, then go back to my work.

Once I was in the office of DC Comics with Joe Orlando. Joe Kubert and other guys, and we were talking about how fast I did a page. So I said, "Why don't we time it?" and Joe says, "Okay, do me a page

ARAGONES: No, no. Sometimes I go to bed at six o'clock in the morning and don't wake up until 12; then I don't work that day.

AH: You have very long days.

ARAGONES: Yes, I've been working over 14 hours a day for the last three or four months.

AH: What do you do in the little spare time you have?

ARAGONES: I love ships, modeling, crafts, books on how-to-do stuff, ceramics. I am a perennial learner. I learn everything. I don't do it, but I learn it. I took a ceramics class and I went for a whole year... I know now how it feels to do it, and then I don't do it. But I know how. I've learned how to do stained glass, and I'm a carver. I like to read.

WHO IS THE GREATEST,
GRANDEST HERO WHO
EVER SWUNG A SWORD?



...THE ONE MOST
IRRESISTIBLE TO WOMEN?



...THE TRUE LEADER
OF MEN?



WHOEVER IT IS, IT'S **NOT**
GROO
THE WANDERER
BY SERGIO ARAGONES!

travel.

AH: Getting back to your work, did Groo come to you as a series thing? Or was it meant as a one-shot for Destroyer Duck?

ARAGONES: No, I wanted to do comic books. I love comic books. I wanted to do a comic where I owned part of it. When I do the *Mad* pocketbooks, I get a percentage and these are my copyrights. But comic companies want everything for themselves. So, since 1976, when DC asked me to sign their "work-for-hire," I said, "No way I would ever work for hire." So from 1976 until Pacific Comics came about, there was no way I was going to work for comics. I had the characters and was going to publish myself. Then Pacific came along, and they'd not only distribute it, but also publish it. It saved me a lot of aggravation.

AH: How did the actual concept of Groo come about?

ARAGONES: I have always liked Conan, the (Robert E.) Howard books, but as I read them I always thought they were very funny. I mean in the sense of a barbarian in a loin cloth walking around in a helmet with horns. Generally, it was

terrific and I loved it, but I couldn't see it as serious. See, when you visualize something, you visualize it with people like us. When I saw Conan—there were no movies and no comics—I saw him with my humorous style. I couldn't help it. So I always wanted to do a humorous barbarian, and that's how Groo came about.

AH: Did you have quite a few ideas for a series at the beginning?

ARAGONES: First, I did ten million sketches of the guy doing positions like a little adventure story. I did tons of them. Then I did one page to see how it would look in a comic-book form. And I liked it. It was this one [page 30 of the *Eclipse special*]. And it was just a gag in itself. So, after that page, I did this one [page 29 of the *Eclipse special*], and I wrote part of the story, slowly. But it lay there totally unfinished because it was like a practice story. No plot, no nothing; I didn't know what was going to happen. I did an entire story and then Mark Evanier told me they were doing this benefit issue [*Destroyer Duck*] and asked if they could publish that Groo story, the one with the monster falling on top of the girl. I said sure. Then I



wrote a lot of story outlines. I still have about 50 of them I haven't used.

AH: What is your agreement in working for Marvel?

ARAGONES: Well, I don't work for Marvel. We work together because we are partners. I get a percentage and they get a percentage.

AH: Did you go to them with Groo?

ARAGONES: No, they approached Mark and asked if I would be interested in doing it for them. From there, we started negotiations. It took over six months negotiating the contract and I never talked to them. Our lawyers did all the talking. And Mark. Meanwhile, I had an issue to come out and Pacific couldn't print it because they went out of business. I couldn't give it to Marvel because they were still in negotiations, so Eclipse took it and published it. They did a very limited edition—30,000 copies—so that's why it's so hard to get.

AH: Has the popularity of Groo surprised you?

ARAGONES: Not really. I had a lot of guys who liked my work in *Mad*. And I put a lot of work into it. It is not a hack job. So I knew people who like my work would like it.

AH: Some people do their best work when they are doing it for their own pleasure.

ARAGONES: Right, that's what it is.

AH: Has it ever become work, a chore?

ARAGONES: Not yet. It is a lot of fun, but sometimes I wish I had more time to draw. People say "When are the posters coming out?" and "When is the coloring book?" and—

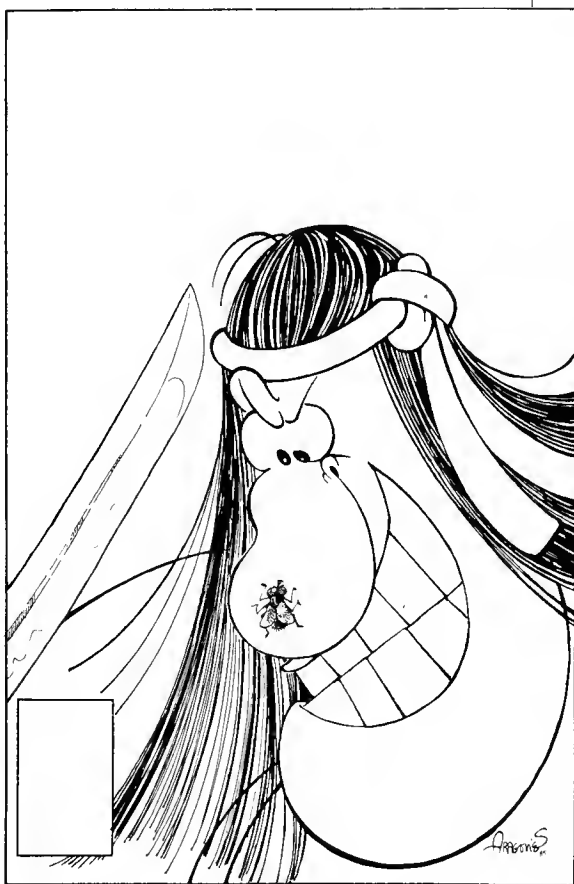
AH: Coloring book?

ARAGONES: Yes, I'm taking the biggest two-page spreads and printing them in a larger format in black and white, taking the logos out and finishing the pages so they look like little posters. I call it a coloring book, but it'll take some patience to do it. Imagine coloring the one with the pyramid [Groo #14].

AH: Jon Sable #33 was a surprise.

ARAGONES: Mike Grell and I go back a long time and we said one day we would have to work together. Then one day...they sent me a script. They never told me the deadline until they called and said, "We need this next week." So, it's a little rush job, but I had finished a complete issue of *Groo*, so I was between issues.

AH: Do you ever find yourself looking back over previous work and feeling you could have done better?



ARAGONES: Every issue. Not because I did it wrong, it's just I feel every issue to issue I draw better. I look at it and say, "How could I have done that?"

AH: What's the story on the Groo graphic novel?

ARAGONES: That was written completely by Mark. This is the first time I'm drawing something I haven't written, so it's a lot of fun in that sense. I got the first pages and I was cracking up, really funny. It's called *The Death of Groo*, and he thinks he's dead, so he's really worried. That's taking an awful lot of work, because it makes you conscious that it is going to be on a finer grade of paper.

AH: When will it appear?

ARAGONES: We don't have a publication date, but I can tell you it's going to take me three months to illustrate. So at least six months.

AH: So what can we expect from Groo in the future?

ARAGONES: Exactly what you're getting now. Good humor, dragons, witches. In the next issue, you're getting Grooella, which is his sister. The next three issues in a row are about Grooella, and they have flashbacks of when they were kids. Groo spent the whole time stepping on ants, kicking dogs.

AH: Doing what he does best.

ARAGONES: (Laughing) Doing what he does best. ●

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NEW ECLIPSE UNIVERSE

By John Lustig

Wouldn't it be nice not to have to wait a month...or two months...or more for the resolution of the latest cliff-hanger? Sure it would. At least, that's what the folks at Eclipse Comics believe—and they're backing up their hunch with a big gamble: the introduction of two low-priced, bi-weekly comic books.

The New Wave is a super-hero team book written by Mindy (*Lois Lane*) Newell with pencilling by newcomer Lee Weeks and inking by Ty (*Stig's Inferno*) Templeton. *Airboy* revives a golden age hero originally published by Hillman Publications. The updated adventures of the world's youngest flying ace (co-starring the old Hillman character The Heap) are being written by Chuck (*Evangeline*) Dixon with art by Tim (*Scout*) Truman, Stan Woch, and Tom (*Timespirits*) Yeates. Both of these premiered early this summer, after previews in *Miracleman*, *The New DNAgents*, *Scout*, and *Amazing Heroes*.

With only 13 pages of story and art (plus three more pages for letters and other material) per issue, *The New Wave* will be the thinnest four-color comic books around. But they'll only cost 50 cents apiece (75 cents in Canada), so they'll also be the least expensive. And—in terms of the number of pages you get for your money—they'll also probably be the best deal put out by an independent comic publisher.

The Eclipse Universe

As if that weren't enough, the introduction of *The New Wave* and *Airboy* coincides with a major change in policy for Eclipse. In the past, Mark Evanier's *The New DNAgents* and *Crossfire* were the only two Eclipse books featuring crossover appearances by characters. From now on, however, all Eclipse comics set in the present—except for anthologies and mini-series—can (and probably will) feature crossovers.

Common experience with *The Heap* will serve as a catalyst for the first crossover between *The New Wave* and *Airboy*. Crossovers between the two books (as well as appearances by *The Heap*) will continue on a fairly regular basis. This means that—since *The New Wave* and *Airboy* ship on opposite weeks—you'll often be getting the equivalent of a single, weekly comic book.

"Isn't that exciting? I think that's so wonderful!" enthused Eclipse editor-in-chief Cat Yronwode. "When I was a fan that's what I

would always say, 'If this could only come out every week...'

"They've proved in Japan that it can be done every week. Their way of doing it is to use a simpler drawing style and fewer pages per installment. But it's exciting to have it every week. So we're trying for an American approach to this in that we're using the same heavily rendered drawing style that American fans want and insist upon. But by using fewer pages we can come out with a story every other week. And then—when we do crossovers—they'll come out every week.

"I just think it's fantastic. I mean, I'm waiting. That's going to be the real thrill for me right there—when you can get an installment every week.

"This has never been done in American comics before as a regular ongoing thing. I mean there were weekly comic book inserts (*The Spirit*) in newspapers. And there was *The Blood of the Innocent* which was a four-issue limited series...

But I don't think any bi-weekly, ongoing comic has ever been done in America."

Eventually, *Miracleman*, *Crossfire*, *The New DNAgents*, *The New Wave*, *Airboy* and possibly even *Mr. Monster* will eventually feature crossovers. The goal is to tie all these books into a single, cohesive Eclipse universe. Yronwode is adamant, however, about nixing any crossovers which violate a book's unique "feeling of reality."

"As a fan, I always resented it when a character like Shang-Chi from Marvel's *Master of Kung Fu* would go to another dimension or meet Spider-Man. I thought it cast the whole premise of *Master of Kung Fu* into the garbage can. I would never force a team-up that was against the character's basic [nature]. I'm not going to crack a whip and say 'Come on, we've got to boost sales. We've got to make these characters crossover even when their emotional premises are very different.'"



PHOTO BY SHELAGH LUSTIG

Cat Yronwode and Dean Mullaney display the cover to *New Wave* #1.

Eclipse publisher Dean Mullaney stressed that some books will clearly not fit into the company's "cohesive" universe. "Something like *Scout*, which is set in the future, is not going to tie in with the other books—because that would mean Scout's future would have to be the future of the DNAgents and we don't want to do that to the stories."

"If you do that then you end up with a crisis on your hands," observed Yronwode.

"Of course, we could intentionally screw up all our continuities so that we could do a crisis series," responded Mullaney.

"We've talked about doing that, actually," said Yronwode.

That was almost certainly a joke because Eclipse has actually taken great care to prevent a continuity crisis. For instance: Since all Eclipse characters are creator-owned, contract negotiations to allow crossovers were tricky. In addition to protecting their copyrights, creators wanted to protect the integrity of their characters. So Eclipse agreed that the various creators will be solely responsible for their characters' dialogue—no matter where those characters appear.

Thus, if Mark Evanier's *Crossfire* appears in Alan Moore's *Miracleman* then Evanier will write all of *Crossfire*'s dialogue. By the same token, if *Miracleman* shows up in *Crossfire* then Moore will script *Miracleman*'s dialogue.

By letting the creators keep control of their creations, Eclipse should be able to avoid most of the continuity snafus which have plagued other companies, according to Evanier. "One of the problems in DC and Marvel books is that the characters keep going from hand to hand. The reason the DC universe was in such a mess that they had to have a crisis was that over the years 105 different people had written *Superman*. And they'd change things and add things to the legend. And the editors of *Superman* never read *Batman* and so on."

Despite this, some people are concerned that Eclipse is trying to become too much like Marvel and DC. These critics grumble that Eclipse is "selling out."

"I've already got people saying that," notes Yronwode. "It's a free country. . . They can say what they want. I can't comment except by reiterating the truth."

And that truth, according to Yronwode, is that "we have a lot of fans who really want a coherent universe. They want all our books to relate the

way all of DC's books do and Marvel's books do. We really want to give people what they want. So this is our attempt to be—I guess—as commercial as possible. Or as receptive to fans as possible. It depends on how you want to look at it."

A fan at heart, Yronwode loves team-ups and insists she won't sacrifice the unique flavor of a series in order to blend it into the Eclipse Universe "As far as what's inside the books, we don't treat art like sausage. We don't treat our artists and writers like sausage makers. So it's not an assembly line product."

Yronwode did note, however, that Eclipse has made one minor concession to conformity. In the past, Eclipse's creative people has used the company's logo on covers in a haphazard way. Recently, using a new cover design by Scott (Zot!) McCloud, Eclipse has stabilized its logo in a single position at the top of each of its comic book covers.

"We are trying to have a little higher profile," said Yronwode. "We

want to make people aware that they're actually buying Eclipse books and not just good hooks that they happen to like."

It may seem like a small thing, but the idea of establishing a company persona—and perhaps a company universe can be a major factor in a comic publisher's success.

"It's a very strange thing but it's only in comic books that people buy all of a company's product," said Evanier. "They buy all the Marvels and all the DCs. It's like going into a record shop and saying give me all of Reprise's records or give me all of Atlantic's records. It doesn't make a lot of sense. But people do it so we might as well give them something so that if they're going to buy all of the Eclipse books they . . . make sense together."

The New Wave

Like most superhero teams, the New Wave is formed to combat a global menace. In this case, the menace is a power-hungry corporation which is up to no good aboard its privately-

A page from *New Wave* #2.



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owned space station.

The heroes who band together to thwart the corporation include Tachyon—a high-flying, super-strong extradimensional alien; Dot—an industrial spy who can shrink in size and fire electromagnetic bolts; Polestar—a circus acrobat with martial arts skills; Avalon—a “witch” who has power over nature; her boyfriend, Impulse—who has telekinetic powers; Megabyte—a mechanical man; and Professor James Holmes a scientist who acts as mentor to the group.

In many ways, the creation of *The New Wave* itself is also a team effort. The initial plot comes from an unfinished science fiction story that publisher Dean Mullaney wrote about six years ago. Two of the central characters in the current plot, though, come not from Mullaney but from editorial assistant Sean Deming. Although he’s editor of the series, Deming had the initial idea for Tachyon and Dot years ago.

“A friend and I were planning to do a comic on the effects of alcohol on the body. She presented the idea of a shrinking character [who would be an alcoholic]. From there I created the actual character: Who she is... What her name is... And

what her costume looks like. That project was subsequently shelved. Even though we had figured out the whole story, we couldn’t find a publishing house.

“Then we came here to Eclipse and quite awhile later Dean walked up and said, ‘Let’s brainstorm a superhero team.’ So I suggested the inclusion of Dot—and Tachyon, which is another character I’d worked up. I’d come up with a storyline for him that was really horrible. It really stunk. But the character himself was rather interesting.”

Using all this as a basis, Deming, Mullaney and Yronwode came up with a basic plot and cast of characters which they then turned over to writer Mindy Newell who further refined the concept.

So what is the basic story?

“Professor James Holmes is a scientist in a space station run by a private corporation,” explained Yronwode. “He’s got all these theories about particles which go faster than light called tachyons... Anyway, he does an experiment and inadvertently causes this person, Tachyon, to appear from a faster-than-light universe. He implodes into our universe.

“All hell breaks loose on the space station. It turns out that the people who run the station do not have good intentions at all. In fact, part of what they’re doing is trying to hold the United States for ransom.”

Holmes sends Tachyon to Earth for help. Tachyon quickly encounters two superpowered people who seem ideal: Avalon and Impulse. But there’s a hitch. So far the two teenagers have kept their powers hidden—and Avalon wants to keep it that way.

“She comes from a long line of witches and the reason she feels that she has to hide her power is that witches were persecuted,” said Yronwode. “Her power is inherited. It’s a genetic power—the completely unexplainable manipulation of matter and energy. She doesn’t sit around and do mumbo jumbo spells. She just does it. She doesn’t do something dorky like casting hex bolts.”

Her boyfriend, Impulse, has the power to levitate objects and views his abilities completely different. He wants to be a superhero and he is eager to help Tachyon.

While all this is going on, events are progressing which will eventually bring the mysterious Megabyte into the story. Is Megabyte just a robot? Or is he more? Maybe he’s the Tin Woodsman in disguise. In any event, Eclipse is promising a major plot development concerning Megabyte and so the company is keeping mum about the mechanical man’s secret.

There’s no such mystery about Polestar. We soon learn that she’s become separated from her circus due to an overnight, romantic interlude with an Air Force pilot. He offers her a lift to her next stop, but in mid-flight there’s a red alert. The pilot is ordered to an airbase where he’s supposed to take a shuttle craft and try to save the space station. Not wanting to get court-martialed for flying a civilian around, the pilot tells Polestar to get out and hide when they get to the base.

Meanwhile...

In the course of her snooping as an industrial spy, Dot learns about the plot aboard the space station. As industrial spies go, Dot is quite patriotic. Because of her abilities, she figures she’s the only one who can prevent the space station from sabotaging the U.S. defense system. So she decides to steal the space shuttle single-handedly and save everybody. In the process, she runs into Polestar and recruits her help.

“Dot is a very troubled, disturbed

person although that won't be apparent at first," said Yronwode.

Denning's original story about Dot's alcoholism will eventually be told in *The New Wave*. According to Yronwode, "It's a very good story. It does not have any stupid scenes in it where she decides to never drink again like Tony Stark. She's probably the most cynical member of the group. She's definitely in it for the money."

Polstar, on the other hand, wants fame, said Yronwode. "She's a circus performer. She wants to be in the limelight. She wants to be loved and appreciated."

Several of the characters are quite headstrong and when Newell started writing she was surprised by some of the things the characters did. "The biggest example of that is Nancy Dreiser, who started out as a minor character and was going to be killed off at the cliffhanger in the first issue. . . And she said to me, 'No No! No! I want to live! You're not doing this to me!'"

"She took on a life of her own and

she's become a very important part of the book. She is an associate of Professor Holmes and Cliff Pasternak. The three of them are the big-wigs of this so-called corporation. Cliff and James have a friendship that goes all the way back to college and possibly even before that.

Nancy joined them when they were doing graduate work at Stanford University. . . Cliff is I guess what you'd call 'the bad guy.' The story basically started out as a conflict between Cliff and James. Then Nancy was in there. So now we have Cliff and James at opposite ends of the spectrum and Nancy trying to stay in the middle. I didn't originally plan for that to happen. Originally she was just one of the assistants who gets killed off. And now she's a major part of the story.

"As far as the other characters forming their own personalities—they all do. None are purely good or purely evil. . . All of them are just trying to deal with life as it comes along. Nobody in the book is a true hero. Nobody is waving the

flag. In fact it turns out that James was a member of the [radical anti-establishment movement] in the '60s in Berkeley."

Cliff was too. Unlike James, however, Cliff has not become a disillusioned yuppie. Cliff still wants to change the world. But he's taken the well-intentioned dreams of his youth and "twisted them around," said Newell.

Tachyon is another character who's more than what he seems to be.

"He's an alien—our resident E.T.," said Newell. "The others look on him as sort of the purest of the group because he's not from Earth.

But we're going to find out that where he comes from he's not exactly clean either. . . I treated him like a Frankenstein monster in that Cliff and James bring him into this world and he doesn't fit in. He is their monster.

"He's really not going to fit in. He's going to try. But all he really wants to do is go home again. The question is: Can he go home again?"

"It's hard to say what his moral outlook is right now because everything is so new to him. For the first few issues he doesn't say a word.

"Basically what I'm doing with Tachyon is trying to take the tack—no pun intended—of: How would it be to suddenly be popped into another universe—or another culture? How would you react? To me, the first reaction would be that you'd be scared out of your mind. Your next reaction would be to fight back in anger. And the next thing you would do is to latch on to the first kind face that you come across. So Tachyon latches onto James because he senses a kindness in him. From there it just kind of escalates."

Although Tachyon is from a faster-than-light dimension and can move very quickly, he's not going to be moving so fast that everyone else seems frozen in place.

"His powers are basically that he's—I guess he's a toned-down Superman," said Newell.

"He is extremely intelligent and one of the reasons. . . is because he does think faster. He puts things together faster. I mean he doesn't have a computer for a mind but he's just more intelligent. Sometimes I think that people who are geniuses are smarter because they put their thoughts together faster than the rest of us."

It may sound like the New Wave team consists primarily of people with emotional problems, but Newell points out that "Avalon and

A Paul Gulacy *New Wave* cover.





Impulse are just normal teenagers. They don't have any particular angst other than the angst that teenagers all go through. But I would say that in terms of having the most problem-free existence that Polestar is definitely way ahead of the crowd. She just takes life day by day and nothing really fazes her. I'm not saying she doesn't get upset or anything. But she accepts life as it is and doesn't fight it. She works with it. She's the healthiest one of the group. Being part of the group is exciting and fun for her.

"And when it stops being fun she'll leave."

Airboy and the Heap

Airboy may be new to most readers, but he's an old friend to Yronwode who wrote in 1982 "Airboy first took to the skies in the second issue of *Air Fighters Comics*, in November 1942. He seemed to be an orphan. His guardian was a monk named Martier, who, for some strange reason, was engaged in the rather unlikely (or unmonkly) field of experimental aircraft design. When Martier's airplane was sabotaged and he was killed,

Davy took to the skies in pursuit of revenge. Airboy, as he called himself, next turned his attention to wiping out the entire Japanese and German air forces, with spectacular results."

Yronwode edited a Ken Pierce publication, *Valkyrie*, which reprinted most of Airboy's encounters with the vivacious female flyer, Valkyrie. While doing research, Yronwode learned Airboy's copy-right expired in 1986.

"I just sat on that knowledge and didn't tell anybody except for Dean," said Yronwode. She and Mullaney then began a salvage operation, securing legal rights to Airboy, the Heap and many other Hillman characters.

Despite other commitments, artist Tim Truman—a hardcore Airboy fan—eagerly assumed editorship of the series and drew several covers as well as pencilling the preview story and first two issues. (Stan Woch began pencilling with issue #3.) Truman signed on another Airboy fan, Chuck Dixon, as writer.

"I've always wanted to work on Airboy and never thought I'd get the opportunity. When Tim told me

about Eclipse reviving it I almost flipped," Dixon.

"Tim has been terrific to work with. He basically provided the skeleton of how to bring back Airboy and I worked from that. Tim's really been the guiding light on the series. . . He and I just saw eye-to-eye exactly how Airboy should return and be portrayed today—combining horror elements with the action and adventure elements with high tech stuff."

"We're using Airboy's old costume because we think it's just the greatest costume he could wear," said Yronwode. "It's just perfect. There's another character called Skywolf whom we're reviving. He used to have one of the dumbest costumes ever invented. He had a big stuffed wolf head and a wolf skin hanging down behind him. It looked really stupid. Tim Truman gave him a brand-new costume which in Tim's words is 'black leather and hand grenades.' He's going to be really kinky."

"Airboy picks up with the old Airboy. He's an older man now," said Mullaney. "In the old series he lived in a monastery in California's Napa Valley. We only live about a half an hour from the Napa Valley so we went down and did some research. And really the only place it could have been is what is now the Christian Brothers Winery. It was a beautiful old monastery, but now it's a winery. So we got a whole bunch of photos and postcards and sent them to Tim Truman and Stan Woch."

So the story begins in the present time with the old Airboy (David Nelson) at the winery. Living with him are his son, David Nelson, Jr., and a former adversary named Hirota.

"Actually in *Air Fighters* #1 Hirota was the first person Airboy shot down in the war," said Mullaney. "He became Airboy's friend. . . And he's been teaching martial arts to David Nelson, Jr."

However, Junior doesn't know about his father being Airboy until

"Terrorists attack the monastery," said Mullaney. "Tim Truman did the art, therefore the action abounds. People are breaking down doors at the very beginning. I don't want to give too much away, but the old Airboy gets killed and then Skywolf comes in with the second issue. He takes Birdie (Airboy's plane) out of mothballs. . . [David, Jr. becomes the new Airboy] and they go to South America to avenge the old

Airboy's death."

It's been argued that Birdie was always the real star of *Airboy*. At the very least, the plane's abilities were unique. In the Pierce reprint, Yronwode commented: "A good deal of the appeal of the series is embodied in Airboy's fabulous plane, the bat-winged and rivet-studded Birdie. Not only did Birdie flap her wings when flying, she also had talon-like grapplers on her landing gear which could be used for picking objects up off the ground or landing on the backs of other planes in flight. Airboy always spoke to Birdie as if she were alive."

That may be, but Yronwode clearly seems more excited by the flesh-and-blood heroes of the series than the hardware. "I like Airboy because he's young and he's brave and he doesn't care what the odds are. And he's on the side of right and the romantic interest between Airboy and Valkyrie was topnotch. Very enthralling. Valkyrie was a fascinating character."

Inspired by the Dragon Lady in Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*, Valkyrie started out as a femme fatale, Nazi flying ace. But the attraction between her and Airboy was so strong that political and military differences quickly become unimportant. From the beginning, it seemed obvious one of them was going to defect to the other side. Was Airboy going to become a Nazi for the sake of a beautiful woman? A splash page caption in one episode of the old series certainly made you think so:

"Is Airboy a coward? Can it be that he has come face to face with fear? Not the ordinary fear that other men know—but a terror that scorches the living heart—for this fear is not ugly—it is *beautiful*—as beautiful as a girl who calls herself *Valkyrie*! She is not human—her heart is as black as the Devil's... and under her spell Airboy faces the most terrifying adventure of his career!"

It's hard to believe, but somehow Airboy managed to survive this encounter with his virtue intact and Valkyrie soon came over to the side of the Allies—and, of course, to Airboy's side as well.

It should come as no surprise then that in Eclipse's revival of Airboy that a still-young, still-beautiful Valkyrie re-appears and figures prominently in the new stories.

Yronwode notes that the current series brings Airboy's origin full circle in other ways. The death of a father-figure caused the old Air-



Stan Woch pencils for the third issue of *Airboy*.

boy to seek vengeance. And now, the death of the old Airboy is causing his son to seek vengeance.

That's an important motivating factor, said Yronwode, because "there's got to be a good reason for a bright young American boy to have a gun. You don't just say, 'Hey, I'm 17, full of spunk and I'm going to go kill people.'"

But getting vengeance is going to be much more difficult than it was for the old Airboy, said Yronwode. "The new Airboy is going to be in for a lesson as to who are the bad guys. It's not as straightforward as it was back in World War II. You just don't say, 'Well, this is the bad guy and now I'm going to kill Japs.' It's not like that anymore. Political events now are very complicated. As you know this whole bombing of Libya has opened the public's mind as to: Was this right or was this wrong?"

"Airboy's in for a surprise. Let's put it this way, not every government is good and not every terrorist is

evil... Airboy is a character who believes in what America stands for. Now the question that faces Airboy is: 'Is America still living up to its own ideals?'"

That doesn't necessarily mean Airboy is going to be tangling directly with the U.S. government, said Yronwode. "But a government like ours which has supported criminals like—well, Ferdinand Marcos—is a government that places expediency above human interests. And a young hero who places humanity first might find himself in an interesting position."

Make no mistake about it, *Airboy* is in no danger of degenerating into a mild-mannered, philosophical treatise on world politics. According to Yronwode and Dixon, *Airboy* will be filled with a mixture of blazing-gun action, fantastic villains, international intrigue, terrorists and romance.

In addition, Dixon says, the series will also feature the same sort of supernatural horror that kept *Airboy*



popular long after most W.W. II comic heroes disappeared. 'Airboy was one of the few books from that period where you'd read this weird menace story and go 'This is honest-to-God weird. Really weird.' They had some very strange imaginations working on that book. We're talking about sentient rats and super-intelligent beings... done in a sort of icky, weird, shadowy way and that's what we're going to bring back. The stories will vary between heavy horror to basic, action-adventure with enough superhero trappings to attract the readers today."

Dixon added that the horrors that plague Airboy are going to be modernized a bit because "things that were frightening then aren't quite as frightening now."

The most notable of these modernized horrors is actually Airboy's old nemesis, Misery. A skull-faced ghoul, Misery flew a massive plane that—Are you ready for this?—was

covered with white mold. If that isn't strange enough for you then try this: The plane served as a flying mausoleum for Misery's collection of dead aviators.

Dixon promises that Misery is going to be "a much stranger character" than he was before. "Since we last saw Misery he's been living south of the border in this miserable little banana republic. Basically he feeds off of grief and pain and things like that. That's how he gains power. He's been making life miserable for people down there... The mold-covered plane will return but not right away... The emphasis on dead aviators will continue."

Future Universe

In a sense, the future is very much a crap shoot for Eclipse. Yronwode admits that at this point she's not sure how the creation of a single, cohesive superhero universe is going to affect Eclipse's choice and approach to any new series which come down the road.

Over and above that, though, is the gamble Eclipse is taking with the actual publication of *The New Wave* and *Airboy*. The company that introduced low-cost four-color comics into the independent market is now pushing the price tag even lower.

"Yup! We're staking our success here on this becoming a big hit—lots of readers," said Yronwode. "Right now our 95-cent books have a cover plus 23 pages [of story]. For a dollar, our bi-weeklies will give you 26 pages and two covers. So you'll obviously get an even better deal than on a 95-cent comic. That means we've got to sell that many more of them because covers proportionally cost much, much more than interior pages."

Yronwode is quick to point out, however, that Eclipse is doing very well. She positively bristles at the idea that there is anything remarkable about the company launching a major project so soon after the flood that caused \$200,000 damage at the Eclipse offices.

"We're not a fly-by-night little outfit—regardless of how casual our public impression is. A lot of people seem to think—when they compare a small company like ours to a giant-like DC which... has security guards at the door—that the differences are astounding. But it's also a difference of style, not just profitability."

"Doing that [being a successful publisher] doesn't mean that I want to change our style and have security guards at the door." ●



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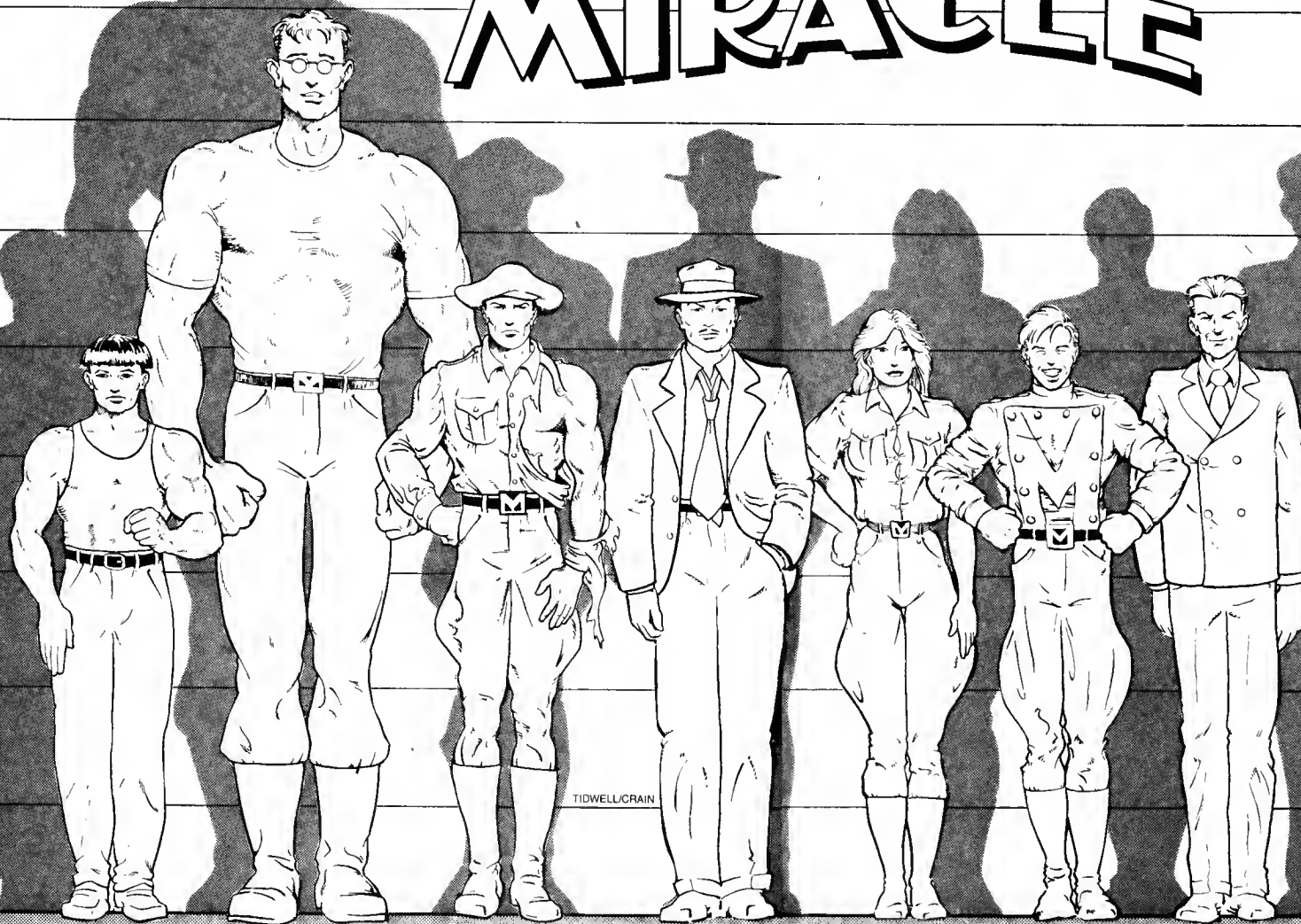
***NOMINATED FOR
FOUR KIRBY AWARDS***

a 15-issue limited series by Matt Wagner

COMICO THE COMIC COMPANY

EXPECT A

MIRACLE



By James Vance

"High Concept"—that's Hollywood jargon for a type of storyline whose primary components are so immediately compelling, they can be successfully summarized in a single sentence. It's how producers in the '80s ask for the kind of readily accessible entertainment that was the norm 40 or 50 years ago. And well they should, for the public response in this decade to such bits of high concept as "Two-fisted archaeologist battles Nazis for the lost Ark of the Covenant" and "Rebels in outer space fight for freedom against an evil Empire" serves as proof that the formulas dating back to "the good old days" have lost none of their potency.

John Wooley and Terry Tidwell, co-creators of Upshot Graphics' upcoming limited series *The Miracle Squad*, are betting the miracle of high concept works its magic for them, too. Considering the exotic setting, colorful characters, and sense of sheer fun they've loaded into their storyline, it looks like a good bet.

And the concept itself? Says Wooley, "Essentially, it's about a close-knit group of people working for a 1930s Poverty Row movie studio who band together to fight injustice." As in the films described above, there's a wealth of potential lurking within that synopsis, and Wooley and Tidwell would seem to be just the men to bring it out. They've certainly been working at it long enough...

The Long Hello

John Wooley would be the first to admit that to most comics fans, his is not a household name, though it may be familiar to those whose fan activities stretch back to the early and mid-'60s. In those days of adrenalin and mimeograph, Wooley was the creator of such evocatively-titled fanzines as *Torture-Murder Pictorial* and the notorious *Mr. B.I.G.*. He also contributed the fondly-remembered "Funk Patrol" series on comics esoterica to *Collector's Dream* and *Dreamline*, and was a regular columnist for the Texas-based *Nostalgia Journal* before Gary Groth acquired and transformed it into the present-day *Comics Journal*-Fantagraphics-Upshot Graphics empire.

His professional writing career has been equally eclectic, encom-

10'

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8'

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6'

5'

4'

3'

2'

1'



passing the roles of poet (for *Rolling Stone* and the Doubleday anthology *Intro 8*), reviewer and columnist (for *The Big Reel* and his present employer *The Tulsa World*), editor/historian (*Dan Turner, Hollywood Detective*, a volume of Robert Leslie Bellem's frenetic pulp tales dredged from obscurity), and novelist (his critically-acclaimed horror tale *Old Fears*, co-written with Ron Wolfe, is presently under option to *Nightmare on Elm Street's* Wes Craven).

Despite this frenzied output, Wooley has periodically found time to turn out the odd comics script, too. His first professional sale, while still in college, was to Warren's *Eerie* back in the glory days of Archie Goodwin's editorship, followed by two more to Goodwin's successor J.R. Cochran. After a two-year stint in the Navy, he began submitting work to Warren again, only to find that the company's original EC orientation had been replaced by an emphasis on "bestiality and necrophilia." Discouraged by the loss of his old market, as well as the state of comics in general at that time, Wooley dropped out of active fandom to explore other avenues as a writer. His only comics-related

work to follow for several years was the curious *Conservation Comics*, a project commissioned by the Oklahoma state government for purposes of instructing low-income families on heating and cooling conservation. It was a worthwhile job, to be sure, but a far cry from the comics he'd once envisioned himself doing.

Enter Wooley's brother Mark, who in the mid-'70s introduced John to an acquaintance named Terry Tidwell. Tidwell, a young civil engineer whose self-syndicated editorial cartoons had earned him an award from the Southwestern Conference of Newspapers, let it be known that he'd always had a yen to draw comics. Despite their contrasting personalities—Wooley, now in his mid-30s, is blond, affable and forthright, while the younger Tidwell is dark and taciturn to the point of shyness—something obviously sparked between the two, for it wasn't long before they'd formed a loose partnership and began putting together proposals for several comics projects.

To date, their only published collaboration has been the short story "R.S.V.P." that appeared in the final issue of Eclipse's *The Fozzie*. There

have been a number of near-misses, most notably "Barbarian Morning," a comic fantasy scheduled for *Vanguard Illustrated's* never-released sixth issue, and the intriguing "Ralph Waldo Emerson—Kill-Crazy Poet," still languishing in the files of Bruce Webster's Phantasy Publications. Around the time the *Vanguard* story was done, Tidwell also landed two pencilling jobs with Marvel, inventory stories starring Conan and The Vision; those, too, were completed but have yet to see the light of day. All the time this was going on, Wooley and Tidwell continued refining their plans for a pulp-style series based on Wooley's short story "The Return of Mr. Mystery," which was eventually to become *The Miracle Squad*.

As with so many projects, getting the series into print was a long, frustrating process of submission and revision, beginning in 1982 with Marvel, which wasn't interested, and DC, which actually managed to lose the original artwork, forcing Tidwell literally back to the drawing board to re-draw the entire proposal from scratch. It was not until they switched representation from Wooley's literary agent to Dallas convention organizer and longtime fan Paul McSpadden (who, back in 1964, had published Wooley's very first fan writing in his fanzine *Mastermind*) that *The Miracle Squad* succeeded in justifying its title by being accepted by no fewer than three publishers: Elite, Renegade, and Upshot Graphics.

Though Upshot succeeded in capturing *The Miracle Squad*, Elite didn't exactly walk away empty-handed; the boys from Midland, Texas opted for another Wooley-Tidwell property called *The Twilight Avenger*. After a flurry of negotiations, contracts for both series were signed on the final day of the 1985 Dallas Fantasy Festival, and an exhausted pair of creators suddenly found themselves committed to turning out two bi-monthly books simultaneously.

The Twilight Avenger debuted in June with highly encouraging advance orders; the *Miracle Squad* preview appeared in the July issue of *The Doomsday Squad*; and the Squad's own title is set to premiere in August. After nearly ten years of determined effort, the summer of 1986 is when it all came together for Wooley and Tidwell.

A Swell Bunch of Folks

At first glance, the most striking thing about the series is its setting.

Few comics are laid in Hollywood, and only one (*Crossfire*) uses its modern-day locale to any real advantage. Returning to the days when the film capital was truly exotic would seem to be an inspired bid for nostalgic appeal, but *The Miracle Squad's* creators are hunting bigger game than mere surface glamor.

Glamor, after all, was virtually nonexistent in the filmmaking ghetto known as "Poverty Row," that string of humble little studios that cranked out endless formula quickies featuring such "stars" as Frankie Darro, Tala Birell, and Maris Wrixon. The fictional Miracle Studios ("If it's a good picture, it's a Miracle!") is an amalgam of all those shoestring purveyors of second features and Saturday afternoon dreams. Its lot is peopled by Hollywood's losers: men and women who, despite their best efforts, are by virtue of their presence there destined for obscurity. Among these "losers" are the individuals who make up the Miracle Squad.

They are not, however, a team of "freaks" in the sense of many of today's super-heroes; they are not, in fact, super-heroes at all, which was one of the reasons Upshot chose to publish the book. "What Upshot's looking for," says editor Jan Strnad, "is more realistic characterization, more complex themes. What appealed to me about *The Miracle Squad* is that it's an action/adventure story, but with real people, rather than super-heroes. What the world needs is not another super-hero comic."

Readers, then, should not expect to see the Squad battling madmen bent on world domination, or patrolling the streets of Burbank looking for bad guys to wallop. (They're not even officially called the Miracle Squad, the only person to refer to them in that fashion being a character of limited intelligence.) Unless called together by youthful studio president Mark Barron, the Squad is simply a peaceful group of co-workers who share a bond of loyalty to the studio and to each other. "They're all good people," says Wooley; "just a swell bunch of folks."

Unfortunately, not all the folks outside the studio walls are quite so swell. Los Angeles in 1937 was teeming with crime and corruption that reached into virtually every walk of life, including the movie business. When such ugliness threatens the happiness of his studio "family," Barron (who in the short story lived a double life as the costumed crimebuster Mr. Mystery,

but in the comics series manages to be just as formidable sans costume) summons his most trusted employees. . .

Tito Guzman appeared in the "Mr. Mystery" story as a stock Oriental sidekick in the tradition of The Green Hornet's Kato and The Spider's Ram Singh. In this incarnation, the Filipino's characterization has been substantially fleshed out to incorporate a long time association with the Barron family. In a relationship loosely based upon real-life models of the time, Tito was employed by Mark Barron's father as his valet, succeeding his own

Near the end of his rope when Barron's father put him on the payroll. Wynde's gratitude extends to lending his expertise at makeup and disguise to the Miracle Squad's cause. "Had Lon Chaney, Sr. lived," Wooley tells us, "he might have been something like Hamilton Wynde—a George Zucco or Lionel Atwill-type low-budget movie menace." Wynde bears a slight resemblance to the latter-day John Carradine.

Johnny Rice, once Mr. Mystery's "automotive genius and electronics expert," has been thoroughly transformed, many of the suggestions for his new persona having been con-



father in the job. However, the Barrons are not stuffy people, being relatively "new money," and though he is technically a servant, Tito is also very much their friend. Mark Barron inherited his services as a result of the tragic circumstances that led to his assuming the studio presidency, the same events that lead to the formation of the Miracle Squad. Thanks to his martial arts training—even though, Wooley cautions us, "He's no Bruce Lee"—Tito is a handy man to have around.

Studio detective Robert B. Leslie is described as "a two-fisted hard-drinking private eye (who) pretends that all he cares about is his retainer. In fact, his flip talk and gruff demeanor disguise a person who cares, above all, about seeing justice done." Leslie's name and general appearance are in tribute to Robert Leslie Bellem, author of the *Hollywood Detective* stories anthologized by Wooley.

Character actor Hamilton Wynde made a brief appearance in the "Mr. Mystery" story under the name William Brown, but his background was not developed until the comics series came along. Wynde's career, like those of many silent stars, was all but ruined by the primitive equipment used on his first sound picture.

tributed by Tidwell. A young Midwesterner trying to follow in the footsteps of his hero Harry Houdini, Rice stars at Miracle in his own film series and performs as a nightclub magician/escape artist under the name "The Amazing Miracro." In his Miracle getup, a combination of bellhop uniform and military regalia, Rice is the closest thing the group has to a costumed hero. He, too, has a physical model; as Terry Tidwell admits with a smile, "I look in the mirror to draw Johnny."

Perhaps the most interesting member of the group is Billy Caserta, the 8'4" prop man who provides most of the muscle needed in the Squad's adventures. The son of Miracle's first wardrobe mistress (whose history with the Barrons dates back to the days when the family business was a string of New York tailor shops), Billy is mildly retarded. Wooley credits Tidwell with Billy's creation, based upon a prototype that appeared in the *Man-Frog* series Tidwell wrote and drew for the now-defunct *Media Sight*. (Tidwell describes this offbeat series about the day-to-day lives ofideshow freaks as "sort of like *The Andy Griffith Show* if Barney and Aunt Bee had been the dog-faced boy and the lizard lady." The same

a cross-country bus bound for Hollywood in search of her missing sister. Identical twins, they had won a talent contest in their home town, the prize being a contract with Miracle Pictures. The highly responsible Sandra had elected to remain at home to care for their aging mother while sister Eileen headed west to cash in on the film contract. Through the vague psychic link many twins are said to possess, Sandra has the uneasy feeling that all is not well in California, and as time goes on with no word from Eileen, she decides to find out for herself.

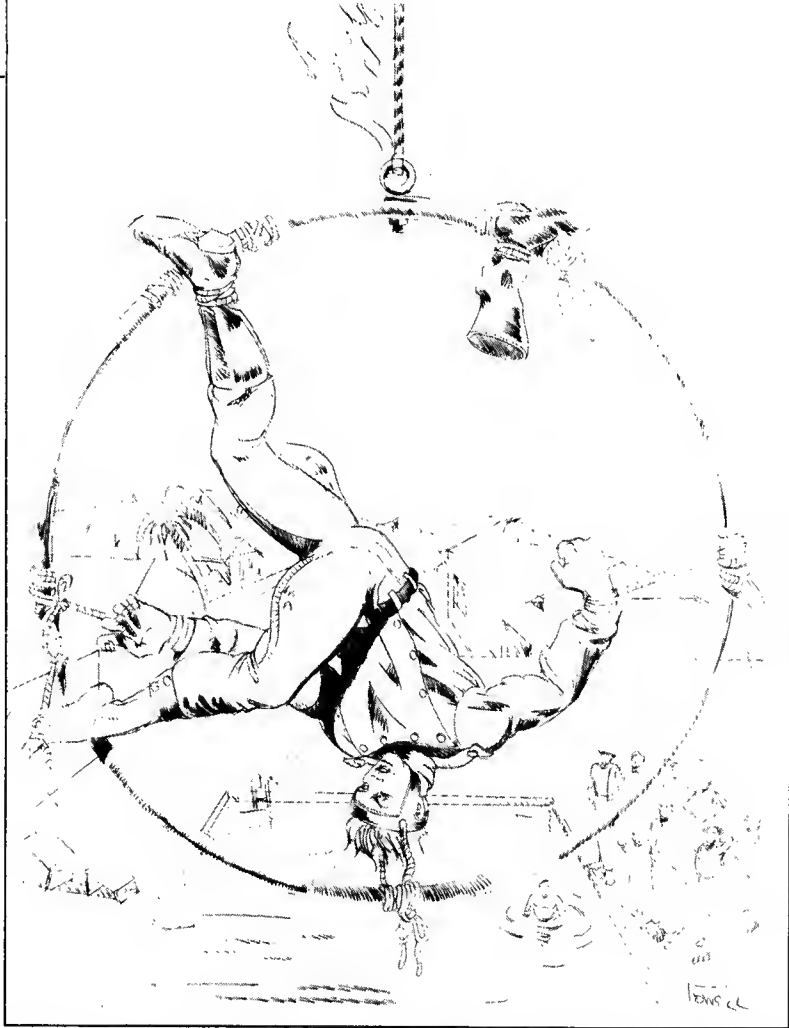
Arriving in Los Angeles, Sandra encounters the first of many shocks as she discovers that Miracle Pictures knows nothing about a contract, the talent contest having been

It should be evident that the Upshot series has been constructed with an eye toward tight plotting, fast action and interesting characterization. The characters are, in fact, rendered with far more subtlety than any brief synopsis of traits can adequately suggest. It is their effect upon the story that leads to yet another element the creators are banking on in their attempt to make *The Miracle Squad* unique. That element has been present since the project's earliest days.

In adapting the story to the comics format, the creators agreed to retain that pulp flavor, eschewing the soap opera-style storylines and characterizations of most contemporary comics in favor of the more straightforward approach that distinguished those dime thrillers of the Depression years. That would seem a natural move for a series laid in the 1930s, but period authenticity was only one of the considerations behind the creators' decision.

"We're trying to discover, or re-discover, something fresh," says Wooley. "We wanted to make a book





Johnny Race escapes "The Flaming Wheel of Death" in an original sketch by Terry Tidwell done especially for *Amazing Heroes*.

that entertains on a number of levels, that appeals to all ages like a good B-picture or a Golden Age comic. Golden Age comics had a simplicity and childlike quality—not to be confused with childishness—that's accessible and rewarding to everyone... which, in a roundabout way, is why we're doing *Miracle Squad* as a period piece. To be that 'simple and innocent,' for lack of better words, you have to go back in time a little bit. Doing what we want, set in the '80s, just wouldn't work. The prevailing winds in literature and

comic books are such that you have to have cynicism, self-doubt, and we didn't want to do that."

This is not to suggest that *The Miracle Squad* is an exercise in sweetness and light; the pulps, after all, have often been justifiably remembered as "the bloody pulps," and this series has its share of mayhem. What Wooley is striving to avoid is the angst and wringing of hands that has been imposed upon many of the heroes featured in current comics.

"What we're doing is not neces-

sarily better than that," says Wooley, "but we're consciously shifting gears away from it. Personally, I've gotten so *damned* sick of the kind of self-indulgent, verbose writing you see in some comics today. Some of it's so thick, trying to read it's like swimming through glycerine. You don't have to do exploratory surgery on yourself to do a comic book. If straightforward storytelling was good enough for guys like James M. Cain, Steinbeck, Hammett and Chandler, it ought to be good enough for people writing comic



COMICS

in review

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE SUPERMAN OF YESTERDAY?

Walking Amongst The Fragments Of a Legend

By Mark Waid

**Superman #423
Action Comics #583**

"This is an imaginary story... about a perfect man who came from the sky and did only good. It tells of his twilight, when the great battles were over and the great miracles long since performed; of how his enemies conspired against him and of that final war in the snowblind wastes beneath the Northern Lights; of the women he loved and of the choice he made between them; of how he broke his most sacred oath, and how finally all the things he had were taken from him save for one."

Before sitting down to write this review, I discovered that a "critic" for another comics magazine had beaten me to the punch. Fortunately, he thoroughly embarrassed himself by missing the entire point of the story when he dismissed it completely with deep and insightful criticisms like "It [should have] been done in at least four issues, so we could have something more than a plot outline with an occasional vividly realized scene." In short, he did what he constantly accuses other reviewers of doing: forgetting that you simply cannot fairly criticize something for not doing what it wasn't trying to do.

"Whatever Happened to the Man

of Tomorrow?" is not a story about the passing of Superman; it's a story about the passing of the Superman Legend. That it reads "like a plot synopsis" is not a weakness but a strength; all 1960s Superman stories read like plot synopses, and Alan Moore, who has often spoken of his affection for the Superman Legend, was perceptive enough to realize that there was no better or more appropriate way to lay the elements of the Superman canon to rest than through an imaginary tale that pays homage to the Superman of his—and our—youth.

In other words, it's unlikely that if Moore were really telling the Last Superman Story that he'd concern himself with trappings like Elastic Lad and the Legion of Super-Villains. This is no more the Superman that appeared in last month's issue of *Action Comics* than is John Byrne's Man of Steel—for good reason.

There is a difference between a fondness and a longing. Neither this story or this review is a cry for the return of the Superman of the 1960s. But the record should show that there's nothing inherently wrong with concepts like the Phantom Zone and the Fortress of Solitude and Bizarro. They were fresh when they first appeared, and their freshness was maintained for



years because editor Mort Weisinger's reign was an explosion of new concepts and ideas—his stated rule of thumb was to introduce at least one new element into the mythos every six months in order to keep Superman from stagnating.

However, Julie Schwartz's subsequent stable of writers hasn't been able to match that proliferation of ideas, and have instead been milking the old concepts dry. Consequently, the legacy of the 1960s has become a collection of hackneyed and overworked gimmicks that have surrounded Superman so thoroughly that even he can't break free. For the most part, the Superman of the last 15 years was a soporific superhero who no one (including yours truly) could make as dynamic and relevant as his crime-fighting contemporaries. Oh, if *anyone* could infuse new energy into the legend, it would be Alan Moore—but I have a feeling he has a more important role to service in comics than discovering a way to make today's readers take Mr. Mxyzptlk seriously. Given the Toys of a Superman Writer to play with one last time, though, he has managed magnificently in finding a final spark of life in each of them.

One of the things that gives this story its 1960s feel is that everyone is perfectly in character—though not necessarily as would follow from their most recent appearances. For example, Superman speaks to Perry about being a coward; about never having the courage to tell Lois that he loves her, because of how it would hurt Lana. It's one of the



most beautiful moments in the story—yet it wouldn't be right coming from the Superman of the '70s and '80s, who has openly professed his love for Lois Lane. No, it's the Superman of the '60s who could never—dared never—choose between his two sweethearts. (The only exception to this "flashback characterization" is when Alan Moore acknowledges Perry and Alice White's recent estrangement, then brings them together once more, thus tying up the only things resembling a dangling plotline left by the Schwartz *Superman*).

"Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?" is filled with other Weisinger-era touches—the punch to Pete Ross's death, for instance, is not delivered in a full-page panel and milked for five pages of morose caterwauling; rather, it's almost summarily dismissed as the plot barrels forward. And in the best scene in *Superman* #423, the Legion appears in the Fortress to bid Superman farewell, and there's not a Wildfire or a Sensor Girl in the bunch. This is the Legion of Super-Heroes circa 1962, when they were not feature players, but rather supporting characters who turned up occasionally in the Superman books.

But even with all the elements there, it took a strong central hero to galvanize them into a memorable story—and the Man of Steel shone through in his greatest moment of truth. The only complaint I've had

with Alan Moore's Superman in the past is that he writes the character as if he were a 6'2" loaf of Wonder Bread. In Moore's previous Superman stories ("The Jungle Line," *DC Comics Presents* #85; "For the Man Who Has Everything," *Superman Annual* #11), Superman does interesting things, he thinks interesting things, but—in direct contrast to Moore's Miracleman—I've never gotten a comfortable handle on Superman's perception of himself and the world in which he lives.

Here, though, he is as much Man as Super. He speaks openly to his friends, and even does something that Superman never does; he cries. And, most importantly, Moore shows us that nobility, not ability, is what makes him Superman.

When Mort Weisinger began handling the Superman books in the late 1950s, DC's writers had evidently run out of original things for the Man of Steel to do. Consequently, they spent their time placing him in the silliest of situations, most of them dictated by Weisinger himself. Rarely were these stories spectacular, and critics of this period have pointed out—correctly—that Superman and his adventures seldom, if ever, lived up to the potential that his nearly godlike powers would have allowed.

I never noticed

One of the reasons those silly stories didn't (and don't) irritate me is because, even as a kid, I didn't really *care* how Superman used his

powers. Exactly which of his flashy abilities he used to put out a forest fire or defeat Brainiac are not what I remember about those stories to this day. What stayed with me, what impressed me about Superman the most, was that he was always portrayed as the most noble man on the face of the Earth. He had the utmost regard for human life; he always played fair, he never lied; he was never even tempted.

Superman's ideals bear reaffirmation for today's more sophisticated audience weaned on *G.I. Joe* and the *Care Bears*. It's up to comic books to pick up the slack and show people doing the right thing for no other reason than because it is the right thing. However simplistic a message, that's still an important lesson for kids to learn as kids—because that's probably the only time in their lives that they ever stand the chance of really taking it to heart. Unfortunately, in our haste to accelerate the maturity of the comics medium, we've narrowed the forum from which we can deliver that message. I'm not saying that all super-heroes should be as pure of heart and mind as they have been in the past—but I do think that the primary function in real-world terms of one hero in particular—Superman—has always been to serve as a symbol to the ten-year-olds of America, to be an example of what is good and right and responsible. I can't fault DC for trying to update Superman's image, but that particular role might well end up being a casualty of the modernization (who noticed that DC, in *Man of Steel* #1, has subtly slipped us a Superman who doesn't even find it necessary to finish *high school*?)

That's the Superman about whom Alan Moore writes. The emphasis is not on his using his powers in any



new and witty ways in this story (with the clever exception of tracing radio waves with his super-vision). He is just busy being Superman, bravely facing a death more certain than any he's ever faced before.

He is just busy being noble.

He protects his friends and puts their personal safety first, as always. Then, in the end, he makes the ultimate sacrifice for a superman by giving up his powers. "Nobody has the right to kill. Not Mxyzptlk, not you, not Superman... especially not Superman," he says as he owns up to his vow that he would never take a life—a vow made years ago, back when he was only a boy, back before he could possibly have imagined the magnitude of the life-and-death decisions he would have to make as an adult. Never mind that a code against killing seems passe in the wake of Dirty Harry, Rambo and Cobra, and that no hero takes the concept seriously any more.

Superman does.

Superman's regard for life is his strongest character trait, and one that readers—and writers—have been taking for granted for too long. His innate purity may have made him a bit of a one-note character, but I'll take one note over the whining cacophony from the angst-ridden "heroes" of today.

There are so many other wonderful touches in this tale—the characterization (!) of Krypto, the beautiful opening paragraph by Moore, and most especially Superman's brief, final meeting with his cousin Supergirl. Superman is no more—but in the end the cycle continues, as we are left with a young couple, living in a small midwestern town, quietly raising a super-infant.

The artwork, in particular the Perez-linked half, is not only perfectly suited to the tale, but, in places, stunning. Curt Swan is still one of the best and most underrated pencil artists in the medium, and Superman was lucky to have had him.

There have always been a number of people who are mortified that the greatest comic-book hero of them all has been involved in stories about secret identity hunts and mermaid sweethearts and Red Kryptonite (hi, John). Nevertheless, there are too many fans today who look back fondly at those stories for there not to have had some impact. I'm glad Alan Moore counts himself among those fans.

When DC first announced a New Superman for a new audience, many readers were concerned. *What about*

us? we asked. *What about those of us who have followed "Superman through good times and bad, who have come to know and love the Legend of Superman?"*

This is for us. And it is enough. All of us who remember, with love, the Weisinger Superman owe Alan Moore and Curt Swan a tremendous debt. For they have given us one last chance to relive our childhood, not as it is generally relived—dingy and gray and not at all like we recall—but, rather, as it should be revisited—as bright and grand and exciting as we could ever have remembered.

REVIEWS RAJONES

MAN OF STRAW *Man of Steel #1*

In my two decades of comic book collecting, I can recall no event which has sparked such widespread interest as the impending changes to be wrought upon Superman. The ultimate icon of superheroic fiction, the Action Ace is familiar even to people who have never opened a comic.

Within comics fandom, equal excitement has been generated by the choice of a creator to bring about this new genesis. John Byrne has risen to the pinnacle of popular appeal over the last ten years, working almost exclusively for Marvel. His rather abrupt departure from that company added to the circus atmosphere surrounding the new Superman.

DC Comics has given the project its full backing. The regular Superman titles have suspended publication for three months while Byrne re-tells the origin of Superman in a six-issue, bi-weekly series entitled *The Man of Steel*.

Like most of you, I was awaiting the first issue with great anticipation. Unlike most of you, I was fortunate enough to receive a pre-publication, uncorrected copy of the first issue. I quickly read it once, then gave it a more careful second perusal. With each exposure, my thoughts grew firmer, my conclusions more solid.

The Man of Steel #1 is one of the most poorly conceived, poorly written, and poorly executed pieces of pulp garbage it has ever been my misfortune to read.

In my reviews, I routinely re-cap the plot of the particular issue at hand, reserving the bulk of my judgments on the book until later. There are so many weaknesses in this issue, however, that I must raise

objections even as I synopsise what happens in the story.

The most glaring flaw—one which affects the entire book—is one that has plagued Byrne since he first decided to write as well as draw. The man has absolutely no sense of pacing at all. I have no doubt that he could produce a comic book adaptation of the Bible that would run no longer than 32 pages. On those rare occasions when he does take the time to develop an idea, he then seems to grow bored and terminate it as quickly as possible (as when he would dump *Fantastic Four* storylines into Jim Shooter's lap and expect him to wrap them up in a few panels during the course of *Secret Wars II*).

Such is the case here. In a mere 32 pages, Byrne takes us from the destruction of Krypton to Clark Kent's 25th year. What's he going to do in the next five issues—present Superman's life well into the 30th Century?

This race to cover years at a stretch proves especially fatal in the opening sequence. Taking his cue from the first Superman motion picture, Byrne apparently depicts Krypton as a sterile, icy world. I say "apparently" because he only deigns to show us the immediate area around Jor-El's home. Likewise, Jor-El and Lara are the only Kryptonians we ever see.

Also, "apparently," their child Kal-El is a "test tube" baby—conceived outside the womb. References to that fact, however, are couched in such pseudo-scientific garble that it is never made clear—probably in an effort to avoid controversy (in which case, why do it?).

It is just as likely that Byrne chose this method of conception to illustrate his contention that Krypton was, in Jor-El's words, "a cold and heartless society, stripped of all human feeling, all human passion and life."



If such was actually the case, Byrne does absolutely nothing to substantiate it. As I stated, he doesn't bother to show us any Kryptonians other than Lara and Jor-El. And how "heartless" are *they*? Lara is horrified at the thought of her child being sent to a planet so savage as Earth, and bemoans that she will never know "the touch of my child's hand." For his part, Jor-El has worked to ensure that his son will live and thrive. And, as Krypton begins to break apart, he professes to Lara his deep love for her.

We should only wish our own society was so "cold and heartless."

The story then shifts to a time eighteen years later. Young Clark Kent, Smallville High's football hero, is racing for his tenth touchdown of the day. (I suppose, considering all the large blunders in this book, it is no wonder that we also get such small ones as the inability to multiply, as reflected on the scoreboard. Even if every extra point attempt failed, Smallville's previous nine touchdowns would have netted them 54 points rather than 52.)

I assume that Clark's use of his burgeoning superpowers to become a star athlete is meant to illustrate the fact that he has not yet developed full maturity. What it actually represents is an almost criminal case of reckless endangerment. We are shown that he already has a degree of superstrength, and he has possessed invulnerability since the age of eight, when a charging hull was unable to harm him. Can you therefore imagine what would happen to the head, neck or spine of any normal young man who attempted to tackle him full speed?

It is only at this point that Pa Kent decides to tell Clark how he was discovered inside a tiny spacecraft as an infant. This sequence illustrates one of the new twists Byrne gives the Superman mythos that is infinitely more contrived and ridiculous than those which were devised decades ago.

Rather than adopting the star child, the Kents claim him as their own natural son. How are they able to pull off this deception? Well, luckily, just as they bring the baby home, "the grandfather of all blizzards slammed down. It was the worst storm of the century, and we didn't get back into Smallville for five months!" Now, if there is a Kansas anywhere who has ever witnessed a storm of this intensity and duration (and Byrne clearly states this is Kansas, not Alaska), I'd like to hear about it.

Of course, I suppose that is no harder to believe than that Martha Kent was able to pass this nearly six-month-old child off as being newborn.

Young Clark's discovery of his flying abilities is equally silly. His pet dog Rusty jumps on his super-strong, invulnerable master and apparently pushes him off a small incline. Rather than falling, Clark floats in mid-air, and then takes off in immediate graceful flight. Give me the days when we saw Superboy held up by balloons and guided from the ground like a kite by Pa Kent.



This sequence also demonstrates Byrne's amazing facility for dialogue. Following the full revelation of his background, Clark and Pa Kent drive back to the farm, where they are met by Martha. This leads to the following, deathless exchange:

Ma: "You told him?"

Pa: "I told him."

Clark: "He told me."

Having gained instant maturity, Clark decides that he has a responsibility to leave Smallville and go out into the world to help mankind. "But I have to do it in secret." Why? Who knows. He declares that his good deeds must "always seem like good luck, or nature." So one of the deeds he performs is to raise the Titanic! Yes, that was one hell of a stroke of luck, for a ship that sank 70 years ago to suddenly bob to the

surface. Didn't anybody at DC bother to read this story before it went to press?

This sequence shows even more of Byrne's sloppy storytelling. Seven years have passed since Clark left Smallville and we are given no indication that he has ever bothered to return in the interim. I'm sure he has, but there is nothing in the script to support this supposition. How are we to believe Superman loves all mankind if he totally ignores his parents unless he's in trouble? And why bother to keep Jonathan and Martha alive if they only serve a function every seven years? At this point, we also have no indication of how Clark supported himself over the intervening years, though surely this will be explained in subsequent issues (God knows Byrne will need something to fill the space).

Clark describes Metropolis as "a great town. Big. Exciting. It really feels like home." Here again, I'm sure Byrne means that Clark feels comfortable and at home there, but the way it is written makes it seem like Clark is saying that the towering landscape of Metropolis reminds him of the flat plains of Kansas.

Then comes the event that reveals Clark's presence to the world at large. One of NASA's space shuttles is landing at Metropolis to help it celebrate its 25th anniversary. Such a move is absurd on the face of it. Also, while astronautics is certainly not my strong suit, aren't there many factors which dictate exactly where a shuttle can land? The trite banality of the scene is compounded when we are shown a small civilian airplane actually colliding with the shuttle!

Clark is narrating this segment of the story, and this farm boy from Kansas—who for all we know has been a fry cook for the past seven years—describes the two craft as being "still locked together, like dancers in some obscene ballet." Just the kind of language I always used when talking to my mom and dad.

He leaps to the rescue, explaining that "There was no hope at all of pulling that off, unseen." Yet again, why not? Back in the days when writers were required to possess an active imagination, they probably could have come up with half-a-dozen ways Clark could have saved the ship without revealing himself!

One of the passengers on the rescued shuttle is none other than Lois Lane. Her first meeting with Superman—a moment that could have been both tender and electric—

is again marred by the trite narrative dialogue. Clark did a better job of describing the shuttle than he did of describing the woman!

Naturally enough, the crowd gathered at the airport swarms over Clark, wanting to know more about him. He panics and flees, eventually returning home to Smallville. Now, at the denouement of this first issue, the story hits rock bottom, with a thud.

It is understandable that Clark wants to maintain a modicum of privacy away from the throngs, but this doesn't explain in the least why he feels the need to wear a colorful costume while performing his heroic deeds. I laughed aloud when Ma Kent, upon finishing the sewing of her son's costume, suddenly announces that ever since he was twelve years old, she'd noticed that "cloth right up close against you never seemed to tear or get dirty."

I had an easier time believing that Clark's costume was made from his Kryptonian blankets than I do this drivel. Hell, even the ever-present "unstable molecules" makes more sense than this. Don't you think his fellow football players would have gotten suspicious when his uniform never got dirty? And his cape, we are told, *may* tear, simply because it is not in close enough proximity to him. What does this mean? How and on what does this strange power work? Would Lois become invulnerable and squeaky clean if he held her tightly enough to his chest?

Byrne stoops to blatant manipulation when it comes to the matter of Clark's civilian secret identity. He slicks back his hair, puts on a pair of eyeglasses and, as Pa Kent proudly declares, "His whole face seems to change."

That's because it *has* been changed—by Byrne. He draws a completely different face on Clark. Picture, if you dare, Robert Redford donning a pair of glasses—and suddenly he looks like me!

The issue—and the reader's fast-



waning patience—ends with a full-page illustration of the costumed Man of Steel soaring into the sky.

One's first thought, in an effort at objectivity, is to question whether the story only seemed bad because it took liberties with the traditional trappings of Superman. Rest assured, such is not the case. I am far from being a rabid fan of the Man of Steel. But the changes Byrne makes in this first issue are superfluous, unnecessarily arbitrary, and often far sillier than the conventions they replace.

Neither did I have overly high expectations going in. I did not expect to find greatness here. I have never thought of Byrne as being a great writer. I did expect competency on his part. Yet I've read stories cranked out at kitchen tables that showed greater literary skill than is displayed here. Granted, I am working from an "uncorrected" copy, but if Andy Helfer can fix this mess, he'll have my vote as Editor of the Decade. Even then, it would not negate the fact that a creator of Byrne's experience and status should not require massive editorial overhauling.

Nor was I awaiting this issue with a critical culture's glee. I was hop-

ing the book would be good, so that I could heartily recommend it to everyone. I have always thought—and still do—that its greatest importance may come in the way it helps attract attention and new readers to the entire line of DC comics. If it still succeeds in doing so, the loudest voice of cheer you'll hear will be mine.

But don't ask me to recommend it; and don't even think of expecting me to praise it. Subsequent issues can't help but improve, for the first installment was so pitifully poor as to be beyond belief.

There are five issues remaining in *The Man of Steel* series, and it is always possible that John Byrne will be able to salvage it. But my hopes have now turned to a fear that he may only succeed in doing what Luthor, Brainiac and tons of Kryptonite could not:

Kill Superman.

I HATE MEESES The Miami Mice #1

"Punt Punt Ratatatatatat Flump Boom Chunka Chunka Chunka Dug Dug Dug Dug Chunka Chunka Thump Punt-A-Punt-A-Punt."



No, the above is not a cheer for the Rock 'n' Roll High School football team. It is the complete run-down of the sound effects found in a single panel of *The Miami Mice Comic*. It represents the main satirical point in this book: that television shows like "Miami Vice" revel in flash and gunfire.

Anyone whose IQ has broken into the double-digit range should have already known this. We need a spoof like this about as much as we need a parody of pro wrestling.

In the first story presented herein, the Miami Mice—Stubo and Rocket—are on the trail of a dealer in designer cheese in a bottle. First we get to see a massacre, as a gang of cheese-crazed junkies blow away three dealers. Enter the two vice mice, searching for Micky Loseono, the head dealer, who has "a pasteurizer around here somewhere" (one of the better jokes in a script starving for same).

The cops hop into their Mouserati (Hey, we're talkin' big-time humor here) and hunt down one of their informers, who they proceed to terrorize into giving them information. In a rather nice slap at the TV series, the mice then take time off to "go for a boat ride with the radio blasting."

While hitting on Loscono's girlfriend in a disco, the mice also have the chance to kill a few junkies. They then follow the woman back to Loscono's hideout, where they get to kill *lots* of junkies—to the accompaniment of much Punt Punt Chunka Blam Blam (Wasn't that the title of an old Disney movie starring Dick Van Dyke and Julie Andrews?).

When their Chief arrives on the scene, he informs Stubo and Rocket that they have slaughtered more victims than has the designer cheese. "Just all in a day's work" for these two fun-lovin' guys.

The second story features a villain named Scureface, who will probably be funny to the dozen or so of us who bothered to see Al Pacino in "Scarface" a few years back. Working undercover, Stubo and Rocket arrange to swap 200 tons of legal cheese for 20 tons of parmesan—"the hard stuff."

The next day, they drive up in front of Scureface's mansion and, with the aid of some fellow cops, proceed to kill everyone in sight. Most letterers would have demanded bonus pay for this story, which is composed almost entirely of sound effects. Stug Stug Stug.

The only thing remotely funny in this story—and then only to people



who can appreciate black humor—comes in a full-page illustration of earnings. At the bottom of the scene is a notation that "This page is dedicated to the memory of Scureface (sic) and the space shuttle Challenger."

So much lead is thrown at Scureface's mansion that it actually crumbles to the ground. Delighted with a job well done, Stubo and Rocket walk off arm-in-arm, ready to try out "that little Greek restaurant on the other side of town."

Since there isn't enough genuine humor in this book to fill an Archie joke page, there's no way I can recommend that anyone pay two bucks for this black-and-white mess. One of the biggest problems with parodies in comics today is that they always pick the easiest targets (witness the seemingly never-ending string of *Secret Wars* spoofs). Yet, after choosing such sitting ducks, they can't do any better job than in the original. They also show little understanding of what makes their subjects laughable. A person who had never seen any more of "Miami Vice" than the countless commercial trailers could probably have come up with a better satire than this.

It's got to be tough for young Mark Bode to have to work in the shadow of his wonderfully inventive father Vaughn. At this stage, he does not appear to have developed either

visually or verbally to the level of his dad. The scripting is limp, and the artwork shows no more depth than that found in the lesser undergrounds. Bode is still a very young man, of course, and there is no reason to suppose that he won't develop tremendously in both his writing and drawing. But the fact remains that his efforts here are totally sub-par.

With poor art, little story and less humor, *The Miami Mice Comic #1* is a total waste of time and money. One is tempted to say that, with this book at least, Rip Off Press has lived up to its name.

Chunka Chunka. Punt.

REBEL YELL Captain Confereracy #1-2

In an alternate reality, the Confederate States of America won the Civil War—or at least did not lose it. As a result, it has remained an independent country; the course of history in the rest of the world appears to also be quite different from that in our own reality.

The Confederate government has discovered a "super soldier" formula, which will increase a human being's strength, stamina and healing capabilities. Since the original formula also killed its recipients within six days, testing is proceeding at a cautious pace. Only four people are currently being used in the experiment: a black man and woman, and a white man and woman.

All four subjects have an acting background, and the government puts that to good use. It creates a phony superhero—Captain Confederacy—whose staged exploits can be shown on television.

The Confederate citizenry is thus reassured with the knowledge that they have someone to protect them from meddling Yankees and seditious blacks. They rationalize that, by helping to maintain order, the program is beneficial to the black populace as well.

Such a charade is bound to fall apart, and it does so in the first two issues of this series. The initial crack appears when Kate Williams, the black actress, decides to defect to the North. Things then move quickly, in a domino effect. Learning of Kate's planned defection, the government tries to kill her, though she manages to escape.

Following the attempt on her life, the black actor Aaron Jackson takes over the television studios in an effort to expose the Captain Confederacy project for what it is—a



fraud. He is shot and killed for his efforts to do what is right.

This in turn finally plants the seed of doubt in the mind of Capt. Confederacy himself, Jeremy Gray. His illusions shattered, Gray realizes that he too must leave, to sort through the confusing events that have turned his life upside down.

Of course, he may not be allowed to leave.

Off the top, let's get rid of the objections I have to *Captain Confederacy*: I have a little trouble with the basic premise upon which the series hinges. I strongly suspect that America would be much the same as it is today, regardless of who had won the War Between the States.

Despite the myths we white Americans like to believe, the Civil War was not fought so much out of our concern for our black brethren as it was over the unwillingness to let individual states oppose the will of the central government. The Emancipation Proclamation was as much media hype as it was a statement of deeply-held principle; and one that at the time was virtually meaningless. It freed no slaves—that job was left to the guns of Grant and Sherman.

Self-serving fairy tales aside, it seems the institution of slavery would have collapsed even without the war. The simple fact is that it was becoming unfeasible in an economic sense. Abe Lincoln gets the holiday, but Dow Jones rules.

If anything, it may be more likely that a Southern victory, coupled with that fierce belief in states' rights, may have resulted in the exact opposite of the Big Brother-type

federal leviathan depicted in this book—which actually mirrors the very real machinations all too common in 1986 America.

The series' premise also seems to rest on and promulgate the belief that all Southerners were slave holders and are racists. This was and is far from true. And while the South cannot deny the shameful cruelty and inhuman treatment accorded its black citizens right up to the present day, let's not forget that some of the worst racial violence of this century took place in Boston, Detroit and Los Angeles. Not exactly bastions of Dixieland.

Also, at no time in the first two issues are we shown exactly what the status of blacks is in the CSA. Obviously slavery is no longer in force but it is not made clear whether we are dealing with a South African styled apartheid or merely an extrapolation of the Jim Crowism that plagued the South for a hundred years after the Civil War (and yes, still does to an extent).

The focus of the book itself remains vague at this point. If it is meant to examine the problem of racism, the alternative timeline premise seems an unnecessary gimmick. When our reality contains a South Africa and the economic and social plight of black Americans from Tupelo to New York, why is there the need to create a neo-Confederacy? Perhaps because it is safer to do so, just as it is safer to tackle social, sexual or religious matters as they relate to extraterrestrials. Hell, that ain't us shootin' down that uppity nigger—that's just some funnybook feller.

The whole issue of race is largely obscured in the second installment of the series, which deals with our hero (the white man, naturally) questioning the system for the first time. The same was done much better a decade ago, in the Steve Englehart Captain America storyline that came as close as comics could at the time to using Richard Nixon as a supervillain.

The hit with Captain Confederacy being an actor sounds like a refreshing idea, which it is. It is also totally ridiculous. We are supposed to believe the Confederate viewers are so stupid they can't recognize acting in general, or notice the fact that the black actress plays more than one role! Just like we all believe Christopher Reeve is really Superman.

Despite all the cracks and holes to be found in the plot here, Will Shetterly has actually done a very good job in the scripting department: much better than is the norm from the smaller independents. If you can suspend your sense of disbelief totally, you can find yourself empathizing with Jeremy Gray and his dilemma.

Vince Stone does yeoman work on the artistic side. There are many instances when his art lapses into the amateur, but at other times it is quite attractive. Time and practical experience should bring continued growth.

Captain Confederacy is unquestionably a flawed piece of work, but it is at least an attempt to do something different from the standard superhero comic. There are enough hints of promise in it to make it deserving of a trial run. If it can overcome its weaknesses, transcend its reliance on the absurd and find a definite sense of direction, the book could become a winner. I will attempt to follow its progress (which may be difficult, considering I have not seen the title in my area stores) and report again in a few months.

Y'all come back now, hear?

POWER OUTAGE Power Man and Iron Fist #125

It is always sad to watch a series slide into oblivion, especially one which in its past had known days of, if not glory, at least respectability. Such a title was *Power Man and Iron Fist*. Decimated by the loss of a fine creative team, it fell victim to fill-ins and directionless meanderings.

Scripter Jim Owsley has made a game effort to save the book, but his was far too little and far too late.

REVIEWS

Recent offerings left so slight an imprint on the mind that I had almost no memory of what had happened in the preceding issue. With sales figures that were distressingly low by Marvel standards, the hook met the editorial ax that is clearing the way for the upcoming New Universe titles. Having followed the hook from its very beginnings, I felt the desire to comment on the issue that marked the series' passing.

It is perhaps sadly appropriate that the hook died not with a bang, but with a whimper.

The action is set in motion when the two heroes are attacked by John Lumus, a psychotic who blames them for the death of his brother. Following an inconclusive battle, Power Man and Iron Fist have a falling-out, with the result being that Luke Cage walks out, dissolving the partnership that was known as Heroes For Hire.

Iron Fist is then called to the hospital bedside of 12-year-old Bohny Wright—a younger sister whose exposure to an alien spore periodically transforms him into a superpowered being called Captain Hero. The spore is also killing him. Fist is able to keep the boy alive by infusing him with chi, the mystic force that powers the martial artist.

Meanwhile, Power Man once again battles John Lumus, and eventually succeeds in defeating him. He then reconciles himself with Iron Fist, and stands beside him until Henry Pym can construct a device which promises to save Bobby Wright's life.

The boy's fate is already sealed, however. Driven mad with pain, he reverts to his Captain Hero persona and literally heats Iron Fist to death. The Captain's own body then dissolves into nothingness. Power Man is the only witness to the double death, and with Bohhy Wright nowhere to be found, the hero in turn finds himself accused of Iron Fist's murder.

The story ends with Power Man, a fugitive from justice, sitting atop a lonely mountain peak—comforting and being comforted by Misty Knight, Iron Fist's former lover. With a tear welling in his eye, Luke Cage can do no more than utter his favorite epithet: "Christmas."

Like the preceding hooks reviewed in this column, *Power Man and Iron Fist* #125 has many, many flaws. The first is its size. Mainstream comics today appear willing to do anything to justify making an issue "double-sized"—with a concomitant increase in price ("Special 17th Issue Extrava-



Power Man and Iron Fist: The writer and artist going through the motions.

ganza'')

The final issue of a series might seem fitting justification for the expanded size, but only if you have a story that needs or deserves expanded coverage. Such is not the case here. The two extended battle scenes against John Lumus do almost nothing to progress the story, and come off as nothing more than action padding. They also result in the death of a supporting character, for no good reason that I can see.

Worse, it detracts from what could have been a very sensitive and touching story: one revolving around the illness of Bobby Wright. Instead, we get stilted, melodramatic dialogue thrown in for no other reason than to insure that the reader

knows who all the characters are ("I'm the Wasp, leader of the Avengers," and "They call me Mr. Fantastic")

When we should have been seeing scenes of real human emotion, we instead received the goofy antics of Gordy, a government agent who carries a portable telephone that has more functions than Batman's utility belt.

Iron Fist was accorded the worst treatment of all. The personal problems which have plagued him for the past several issues were left totally unresolved. Nor was he given the slightest chance to even defend himself as he was brutally pounded through a solid wall. From the outset, he has been a much more inter-

esting and diverse character than is Power Man yet he was allowed to be ignominiously murdered.

I can also see no good reason for feaving major plot threads dangling at the end of a series, particularly when the scripter has known for some time of the impending cancellation. There was no need to leave Power Man out in the middle of nowhere, still wanted by the police for questioning.

This weak story is plagued by equally weak artwork. Mark Bright, who has shown some promise as a penciller, here appears to be merely going through the motions. Nor does he receive much assistance. Mike Esposito receives sole credit for the inking, and one can see his stamp on many of the later pages. Someone else appears to have inked the first half of the book, though.

Actually, it's hard to tell if anyone inked the art at all, for this book is an example of how nightmarish the dreaded flexographic process can prove to be. Colors bleed horribly, lines and entire images disappear, lettering vanishes. It is a complete mess. (And is it merely my imagination, or do the pages of *advertisement* escape most of these glitches?)

At any rate, the book is ended now. I would very much have liked it to go out in a blaze of glory. Instead, it was hurried beneath unfulfilled promise, its death knell coming as the sound of massive fists pounding the life out of too soft human flesh.

Christmas...

BANG GANG No Such Thing As Monsters #1

When little Jimmy Leggit saw the monstrous creature lunging upward through the concrete, he was quite naturally a bit disturbed. By the time he could get his mother's attention, however, the monster had disappeared. Mrs. Leggit treated her son's fear in the sensitive manner that is the hallmark of American motherhood—she smacked him across the back of the head.

Likewise, when the fish-like creature plops out of the faucet at the dentist's office and grows to monstrous proportions, Jimmy is unable to catch the grownups' eyes until the beast has shrunk back down to guppy size. Giving up on ever convincing the adults of what he has seen, Jimmy pops the creature into his pocket and carries it home.

He then does what any kid would do; he rushes to tell his four best friends about the monster. Unfortu-

nately, they are just as incredulous as the grownups—at least until they return home with Jimmy and discover the beast has grown to a size equal to that of his bedroom.

When the monster again reverts to its tiny size, Michael—the brain of the bunch—urges them to rush with the creature to the city sewage plant. There, they are able to send the beast on its way back to the ocean whence it originally came.

The boys, all being reasonably bright, realize that if one monster exists then there must be others as well—probably right in their home town of Oakville. Thus, with the courage born of innocence, the pledge to band together as the Anti-Monster Gang!

So begins the first issue of *No Such Thing As Monsters*, one of those minor gems that seem to be appearing with greater frequency among the small press comics reaching the stands today.

This hook can trace its roots back to such movie gangs as The Dead End Kids, the comic book kid gangs of the 1940s (best exemplified by Simon and Kirby's Newsboy Legion), and the Grade-B science fiction flicks of the 1950s. If such a hook was treated seriously, it would quickly prove to be a total flop. Fortunately, creator Stephen Holman keeps his tongue planted firmly in cheek at all times.

The second story carried in this premiere issue is entitled "The Thing That Crawled In From the Cold," and plays on one of a kid's worst fears—being alone in the house at night. Here, that fear is justified, as the boys must deal with a shape-changing alien that is eating everything within reach. The sight of the monster—disguised as a washing machine—attempting to eat the boys' dog has to rank as one of the magic moments in comics history.

Even the ads in this book are terrific, and totally unlike anything you'll find in a standard comic (what else should one expect in a book published by a man named Gary Voodoo?). My favorite was the offer allowing you to buy such classic video treasures as "Geek Maggot Bingo" and "They Eat Scum." Remember—you heard it here first.

The third story presented herein is "Where Has Susan Gone?" It opens with the boys hiding outside Jimmy's house at night, using a pair of binoculars to watch his older sister Susan undress—much to Jimmy's bewilderment, of course. ("You're crazy! What d'ya wanna watch my sister for anyway? I'm tellin' ya I see her all the time—she's

horrible—and she's ugly anyway.")

Just as they're about to get to the "good part," the boys are shocked to see Susan kidnapped by a hideous alien monster. No one will believe them (SMACK!), including the police, so it is up to them to rescue the girl—whom the alien has made into a pet. They succeed in their mission, only to discover that the horror is just beginning. To Be Continued.

As I said, Stephen Holman's sense of humor makes this spin-off of old horror shows work very nicely—much more so than the dreadful parodies to which I alluded in my *Miami Mice* review. It is amusing, and at the same time charming, for it does not ravage the monster genre; it merely evokes fond memories far beyond what those old efforts deserve.

My biggest fear is that, comics fans being the way they are, many people will merely glance at the art and immediately put the book back on the shelf. Holman's artwork has a rather crude, underground look to it, but this is a deliberate affectation on his part. He shows, in a back-up story entitled "Rosemary's Dinner," that he is actually a very good graphic artist and a talented cartoonist.

No Such Thing As Monsters delivers warm mirth rather than roaring laughter, and the \$2.00 price tag is much too steep. But it is such an offbeat, yet entertaining package that I will recommend that you give the first issue a try.

And I leave you with these sage words of wisdom from young Michael:

"Remember! Whenever we hear or see something that could be a monster—it probably is!"

PARTING SHOTS

In addition to *Power Man and Iron Fist*, two other series concluded this week. The first was *The Eternals*: a twelve-issue limited series that was so boringly bad that it seemed to run for three years. Its climax came in—what else?—a double-sized issue that, also not unexpectedly, consisted largely of slugfests.

On the other end of the spectrum is *Superman* #523, containing the first half of Alan Moore's imaginary "last" Superman story (with the second half scheduled to appear in *Action Comics* #583). It is an outstanding, tender tale, beautifully illustrated by the team of Curt Swan and George Perez. ●

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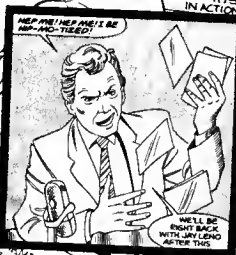
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AMAZING READERS

DARRELL McNEIL
President-Producer,
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Studio City, CA

The Scoop on JQ

Very much enjoyed your "All-Quest" issue, especially the interview with 'ol "Wildman Wildey," as one of our mutual friends, Leo Swenson (also a dynamite background stylist who worked on *Quest*), called him. I remember the impact that *Quest* made on moi as a developing youth, it being one of the cartoons, (along with *Space Ghost*, *Josie and the Pussycats*, the Fleischer *Supermans* and the *Archie Show* (hey, you got your influences, I've got mine!)) that led me to choose animation as my current career. Modesty forbidding, I think I was one of the first people Doug met, (back in 1977 or thereabouts), who actually videotaped *JQ* at the time, and told him so (to which he responded: "Yeah, and I suppose you tape *The Donna Reed Show* too!"). Irony, since a few years later, when he was at Marvel, he asked me if he could borrow some of my tapes (since they were uncult) for a lecture on *Quest* he was giving! Oh Doug, if only you knew.

Anyway, I just wanted to add a couple of corrections to Jim Korkis's article:

1. Yes, it was mentioned in the series that Hadji was adopted. In "Calcutta Adventure," Race mentioned that Hadji's friend, the Pasha Peddler (well voiced by Jesse White, the "Maytag" man) had secured Hadji's adoption papers for the *Quests*.

2. Hadji was in "Skull and Double-Cross Bones," (I should know; I'm looking at it as I write this letter).

3. *Jonny Quest* was not the only series to appear on all three networks. *Speed Buggy* (1973) also bounced around all 3 networks, first CBS, then ABC then NBC (or was it NBC then ABC?) Oh well, it was on all three of 'em as well.

Incidentally, as far as the new series goes, Scott Menville is now Jonny's voice, Don Messick is still Dr. Quest and Bandit, and Granville Van Dusen is now the voice of Race. Don't know who does either Hadji or the new

12-year old girl on the series. (Who? Watch 'n see!).

D.C. HAMPTON
Kansas City, MO

JQ and '60s Animation

I usually don't buy fanzines, but the *All-Jonny Quest* issue was too interesting to pass up. I appreciate Jim Korkis's providing summaries of the original 26 TV episodes, and I think



his background info on Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera is the most thorough I've ever seen. Most entertaining, though, was the 10-page chat with Doug Wildey. He will be pleased to know that I also have fond memories of his *Planet Of The Apes* series—I watched the cartoon show religiously even though I wasn't crazy about the series of movies it was based on.

It isn't true that *Jonny Quest* was the

only Hanna-Barbera series ever created that was meant to be shown in a certain sequence. Does anybody remember *The Perils of Penelope Pitstop*? That show was done in the style of the old Saturday afternoon chapter plays—there was a cliffhanger at the end of each episode, and you had to tune in each week to find out how lovely Miss Pitstop was going to escape the latest death-trap devised by the fiendish Hooded Claw. I'd have chartreuse fits at the very thought of missing an episode.

That whole late-60s period of Saturday-morning TV deserves special attention. If you remember, that was the era of animated Rock and Roll bands like *The Archies*, *The Banana Splits*, *The Chattanooga Cats* and, particularly, Hanna-Barbera's *Josie and the Pussycats*. This last group has so many interesting aspects that I was motivated to write an article about it last year. Did you know that there really was a Josie and the Pussycats singing group that was put together by Hanna-Barbera as a promotional vehicle for the TV show? This group provided the singing voices that were heard when songs were played over the chase sequences. Future *Charlie's Angel* Cheryl Ladd was a member of the group and was sometimes heard singing lead.

At any rate, what I'm trying to say is, cartoon Rock and Roll is a fascinating subject for an article, though I don't know if such an article would be right for *Amazing Heroes*.

Back to *Jonny Quest*: Somehow I find that the prospect of a comic book series doesn't appeal to me as much as I would think it might. For one thing I dislike the idea of setting it in the '80s—the early '60s had a certain mystique to them that I feel enhanced the appeal of the TV show. Also, I don't care for the idea of rotating the art assignments. Really, I see *Jonny Quest* coming off best as a newspaper strip, particularly a Sunday color feature. Anyway, I will be looking out for that new TV series. They've got a ways to go to equal the original.

• *Late-Sixties animation, huh? What about George of the Jungle? Or does anybody remember that twisted bit of psychedelia Tomfoolery? Backing up to Darrell's letter I'd like to go on record as a fan of the animated Planet of the Apes—so is Dave Olbrich, who did the Wildey interview; for that matter. Personally I feel that anybody who doesn't know the lyrics to Superchicken has a serious gap in their education.*

—DS

DAVID MALONE
Sycamore, IL

Byrne in Action

I decided to withhold my comments on The New Superman until I had a chance to see him in action (sorry, that wasn't intentional). I had some definite opinions about what Byrne and Wolfman said in *Amazing Heroes* #96, but I didn't want to make any judgments until I saw the finished product. Now that I've had the chance to thoroughly digest *Man of Steel* #1, I feel compelled to comment.

John Byrne faces a potentially thankless task with this assignment, risking both apathy ("Superman? Who cares about him? Let's have some more mutants, man") and fury ("Who does this pinhead think he is? No more Krypto? No more Bizarro world? I'm buying a gun"). For my part, I think Byrne's serious about wanting to do the best Superman possible, retaining the timeless, compelling elements of the legend and tossing out the accumulated

debris that has clogged the character and made the adventures of the world's greatest superhero dull, trivial, and virtually unreadable for more than 15 years. Byrne trumpets the changes from almost every page of *Man of Steel* #1, letting us know beyond a shadow of a doubt that our old, calcified impressions no longer apply. Does his fresh approach to the achingly familiar work? For the most part, it does. I never thought I'd be able to read yet another recap of Superman's origin with this much interest. Younger fans may read the new series only because Byrne's a collectible Marvel star and the older fans only to indulge in a sense of shock and outrage at such wholesale tampering with a classic, but at least Superman comics are going to be reaching a larger audience than they have for years. And, as someone who's had a great deal of affection for the old guy over the years, that makes me feel pretty good.

Along with the gratification at seeing Superman finally getting the attention he deserves, however, I feel a certain uneasiness, a suspicion that the man

from Krypton may have lost quite a bit in the transition. Byrne may have stripped away most of Superman's stodginess and predictability, but the first issue of *Man of Steel* and the article in *AH* #96 lead me to believe he's also leached off a lot of the character's depth. From all indications, the New Superman may turn out to be little more than a cocky jock, a smug, musclebound, grinning bozo who's living out his high school football fantasies on a larger scale, with Metropolis as his playing field. And though I must confess that the concept of Superman spiking the ball and doing a little dance in the end zone after beating Darkseid to a pulp kind of intrigues me, I need to point out that there's a lot more to our hero than powers and battles. Byrne's done a good job of updating Superman and making the legend a lot more logical than it's been in the past, but somewhere along the way he seems to have misplaced Superman's soul.

Let's go back to the beginning. The concept of Superman was born during the '30s, during a time when the despair and hopelessness of the long, long Great Depression and the rumors of war that drifted over the Atlantic cried out for a savior, someone colorful and brave and good and kind and wise and, most of all, strong—strong enough to put his blue-clad shoulder to the wheel of the world and set things turning right again. And even though this savior came from outer space, he was really an American: not a Rambo or a Ronald-Reagan-cowboy, but a real American, one who understood about soup lines and hopping a freight train to follow rumors of work in far-off states and worrying about not being able to feed your family. Like us, he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and though he obviously enjoyed sending evil running, he wasn't brash or arrogant about it. We knew he didn't think he was better than we were; we knew he was one of us. In fact, he *was* us.

Like most Americans, Superman was an immigrant, someone whose great love for his adopted land still couldn't obscure the great longing for home at the core of his being. For Superman, however, this homesickness was particularly poignant. Kal-El was the last survivor of his home (and this seemed true even when Kryptonians started turning up by the truckload in later years. Like the Phantom Zone criminals, these other survivors always seemed ghostly and immaterial. Only Superman felt real); the glories of Krypton, that strange, grand planet, lived on only in his memories. Small wonder he was so obsessed with collecting and preserving Kryptonian relics and history; small wonder he struggled so hard to keep from losing his adopted planet.



Like us, Superman was painfully aware of his limitations. His powers never seemed to be enough to bring him the things he most desired. He hadn't been able to prevent the destruction of Krypton. He hadn't been able to save Lara and Jor-El. He hadn't been able to stop the death of the Kents. He couldn't seem to convince himself it was all right to fall in love. An undercurrent of the immense loneliness of the man runs through many of the stories. (Fortunately, it was never overplayed at an annoyingly tragic level. There was just enough to give the wonder a slightly bitter edge.) No wonder he and the Batman became such good friends. Both men knew the feeling of having everything that holds your life together vanish in an instant. Their methods of dealing with what had happened to them were very different, but that shared sense of loss seemed to give each man insight into why the other reacted the way he did. (For some reason, though, despite his obsessive nature, I always thought of Batman as the more accessible of the two. Superman always seemed so aloof and superior, but Batman was never afraid to get involved, whether it was scaring a street punk half to death or bringing an eight-year old into his home. Superman may have never matched the Batman's fury, but he never equalled his compassion, either.)

I think being Clark Kent gave Superman insight into certain aspects of what it is to be human, too. If Superman was us, Clark was even more us. Anyone who's been turned down by a woman, or harassed by a hully, or chewed out by his boss, or made to look foolish or clumsy could relate to Clark. He was the nerd who occasionally eclipses the heroic in all of us, and he made Superman far more down to earth than the big guy would have been otherwise. Clark was the endearing, terribly normal side of Superman, and I think I'll miss him the most.

I guess I could refuse to read The New Superman until Krypton is restored to its old, peculiar majesty, the Kents are killed off again, and Clark trades in his Nautilus equipment for a stamp collection, but that seems kind of pointless. I may believe that Byrne and Wolfman have bled off a lot of the poetry in Superman and replaced it with fistfights, but I'm prepared to stick it out until I'm proven wrong. (I will not, however, admit that the new Luthor is a better idea. As several critics have pointed out before, Superman being responsible for Luthor's baldness is really a pretty elegant comic book symbol for emasculation. John, Marv—Superman didn't make Luthor bald, he made him a eunuch! Hating a man because he's better than you is petty; hating a man because he sheared off your family jewels is brilliant! Cut out the nonsense and get back to basics, you goons.)

● *Some keen observations, Mr. Malone. I particularly liked the idea of Superman as an immigrant and your insight into Batman. There's a scene in Dark Knight #3 that I think bears you out. It's where Batman and Robin are escaping the police by Bat-gliding and Robin is shot out of her harness. With perfect dramatic pacing, Miller has her slip from Batman's grip but then catch his cape. He reels her in and wraps her up in a bear-hug, murmuring "Good Soldier. Good Soldier." I found that panel tremendously moving. It captured the vulnerability that is at the heart of Batman's obsession. But back to Superman and more thoughts on Luthor's baldness...*

—DS

T.M. MAPLE
Weston, Ontario

Vision and Revision

I very much enjoyed your "Superman preview" issue, #96. You did a good job of previewing *Man of Steel*—educating us as to its worth and content, without giving away too many crucial plot elements (as is the problem with so many previews, particularly those in something called *Amazing Heroes Preview Special*, for some reason). Also, the two history pieces were very timely. The first reminded us that this is "just" one in a series of



CRAIG ALLEN CAYWOOD



ADAM STOLLER

major Superman overhauls and the second letting us relive the missed opportunities of the last big revision in Superman.

Still, the Byrne revision is somewhat different in that it revokes *all* previous continuity and it presents the grand sweep of the new continuity right up front. With other major revisions, previous continuity was retained (either selectively or in entirety) and the new version was built up slowly. I think it is the suddenness and completeness of the current revision that is worrying so many fans. After reading just the first issue of *The Man of Steel*, I really can't say that any aspect of it was done better than in the previous version, but then I think I should wait to see how all those elements are used in future stories before passing judgment. My major fear is that the new continuity will be tossed together too quickly and thus aspects of it might come to be regretted. But I'm willing to give John Byrne a shot at it. (Big of me, isn't it?) Though I like the "old" Superman just fine, I realize he wasn't on top any more—where he should be!

Everybody, including Peter Sander-son in his preview, seemed to get a good laugh at the fact that in the old continuity Lex Luthor hated Superboy/man because he caused Lex to lose his hair. I always *loved* that "origin," because I thought it was a distinctive origin (you can't argue that!) for this supreme super-villain, but, more than that, I thought it pointed up some special qualities. Firstly, it showed Lex's pettiness and lack of perspective. He hated Superman for such a "small"

thing because it was done to *him*, Lex Luthor. He continued to hate Superman almost because he *had* to. He couldn't back down because it would hurt his reputation, not least of all in his own mind. Maybe he regretted his youthful pettiness (maybe he didn't) but he could never admit it in his later life. Secondly, it showed his vanity. Even a small blight on the perfection that was Lex Luthor was too horrible to be endured, thus his baldness becomes of undying significance to him. Finally, it showed his insanity. I think the "hair incident" drove him over the edge. That such a small event could do this indicates how close to the brink he was—*something* would have done it sooner or later. Taken together, his vanity, pettiness, and insanity show why he could never be the hero Superman was or the great person he fancied himself to be. And this was all nicely symbolized in his origin. Also, let's not forget that Superboy *did* make a small error in saving Lex—a good object lesson in proper use of his super-powers and that small acts can have big results!

It is interesting to note that Lex will have (some) hair in the new continuity but that he will begin to shave his head bald. This will be presumably out of vanity—the same reason (or was it prideful defiance?) that he never took to wearing a wig in the old continuity! Some things don't change, I guess!

In your editorial, you wisely say that we should not prejudice Byrne's new Superman, but then two pages later Dave Wave seems to do pretty much just that! "Super-Republican"? I haven't seen that so far—in just one

issue, to be sure! And David, certainly the new design of *AH* is just fine, but "ass-kicking"? Somehow, this is not an attribute that I would assign to activities I engage in voluntarily. But then, I'm admittedly not up on my leading-edge California lingo...

I wasn't surprised that *Mage* picked up multiple nominations in the Kirby Awards, only that it took this long for this wonderful series to get some of this kind of recognition! Now, if there was only a category for Best Coloring, then that excellent aspect of this mag might get some well-deserved publicity too!

• Jeez, T.M. must you take issue with every other thing I say? First off, I think Dave Wave's piece was a light hearted poke at the hype surrounding the Superman revision as much as the change itself. And I still think that jumping all over Byrne after the first issue of *Man of Steel* is premature. After all, Alan Moore didn't write "Anatomy Lesson" until his second issue of *Swamp Thing* and he's Alan Moore. My California edition of Webster's Dictionary defines "ass-kicking" thusly: "Excellence or Superiority, esp. of design in comic book related fan-zines." So there, ya big palooka. As for your gripe in letter #2433, I'm willing to admit that the hype surrounding Secret Wars was a factor in its poor reception. But that doesn't change my assessment of Super Powers or DC Challenge as being exploitative. They're (unfortunately) comparable in quality to Secret Wars. As for your gripe in letter #2439, I was being ironic not sarcastic. The distinction being that I'm well aware that lotsa people bought/liked Secret Wars but I hadn't heard an intelligent defense of it in our letters pages. Otay? —DS

BRIAN FYKE
Prospect, TN

Growing To Like Superman

This is one old-time reader who is looking forward to the Byrne/Wolfman/Ordway Superman. Not that the other versions have not been entertaining, but the approach to the character the new team is making seems so logical. The mistake in the past has been to assume Kal-El to be infinitely powerful since his arrival as an infant on Earth. How can a contemporary reader, who must pass through stages of development throughout life, relate to a character which has almost always had it "together" (I'm an Ericsonian)? Now we can see the young Clark Kent grow not only in maturity but also in physical prowess. I will assume, however, that his toilet training will not be portrayed.

With the Post-Crisis issue, the All-Jonny Quest issue, and this Byrne Superman issue, I'm thinking about getting *Amazing Heroes* regularly. As King Agrippa said to the Apostle Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a subscriber." At least, that's what my Post-Crisis New Testament reads.

DANNY DeANGELO
Dorchester, MA

Murder the Legend? About Time!

John Byrne has murdered the Superman tradition! It's about time someone put it out of its misery! Seriously, I find it hard to believe there are people out there who are actually going to miss Krypto, Superboy, Supergirl, and all that other garbage (I'll sleep a lot better at nights without Beppo the Super-Monkey!). For my part, I'll miss the Fortress of Solitude and the Phantom Zone, but I realize all these changes are for the best. Everything Byrne and Wolfman are doing sounds great! At last, Superman will become the #1 super-hero in comics, as he should be! On the subject of John Byrne, will we be seeing previews of *Legends* and the series John is creating for DC?

Also, I'm pleased to hear that there

will be no other Flash besides Wally West. I assume the new Flash hook is about Wally then, right?

While I'm here, I'm having trouble understanding how John Byrne's version of Superman will fit into the Post-Crisis universe. After the new universe is formed in *Crisis* #1, we still see the Earth-1 Superman shouting "Great Krypton," talking about finding reference to Supergirl's death, and the *Daily Planet* is still owned by Galaxy Broadcasting (even Lois and Lana are doing the TV news in *Crisis* #12). Also, if the new Luthor never gets jailed, what was he doing in prison in *Crisis* #11 when Batman talked to him?

There's other problems that need fixing as well. Dick Grayson can't have hased his Nightwing identity on the hero from Kandor, and Mon-El can't have met Superboy and heen sent to the Phantom Zone

MIC McCONNELL
Richmond, VA

A Batman Symposium

R A Jones's recent review of *Batman and the Outsiders* # 32, along with responses by Willie Holmes and Randy Freeman, have pointed up an interesting transformation which the Batman's personality is undergoing due to the

new creative direction at DC. Holmes claims that Batman is becoming the "Captain Ahab of comicdom, thoroughly obsessed." In light of these comments as well as Batman's current portrayal in *Dark Knight* and *Heroes Against Hunger*, I think there should be a symposium of sorts, made up of fans and creators alike, commenting on the Batman, his motivations and his psychological development. Such a symposium, with your magazine as a forum, should be exciting, informative and ultimately beneficial to all of us who derive pleasure reading about the caped crusader's exploits.

Not being especially shy, I am willing to get the ball rolling with my own theories, observations and opinions. None of my impressions is carved in stone and each is open to debate and refutation; my mind is open. Let us see what we have.

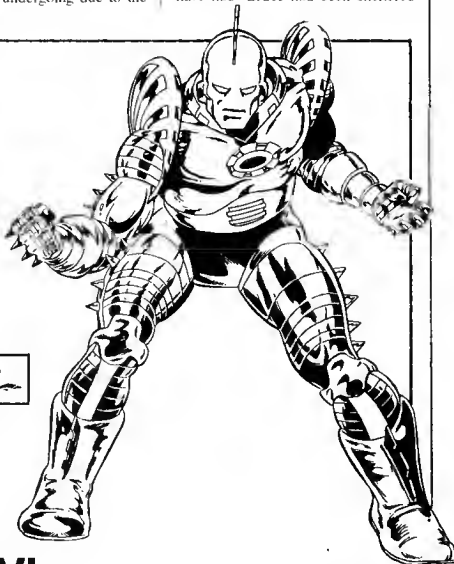
Of course, there are very few of us who are unfamiliar with the Batman's origin. As a young, pre-adolescent boy, Bruce Wayne was walking home with his parents when they were gunned down before his horrified eyes. Bruce swore on their graves that he would spend his life warring on criminals.

Who could witness such an event without suffering devastating psychological repercussions? We need not get bogged down in psychological theory and terminology to see the profound effect on Bruce this grisly scene must have had. Bruce had been sheltered

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from the world by wealthy, loving parents. An outsider stole this security from Bruce and removed Bruce's source of nourishment, love and happiness. Bruce's world was transformed from a warm, benevolent place into a cold, malevolent place where pain, suffering and chaos threatened existing order. As Bruce's sanctum was destroyed, so was every remaining sanctum a ripe and helpless target for a cancerous society.

But Bruce had been taught that, to a certain degree, a man controls his own destiny. To place it in homely terms, while he cannot control which cards are dealt to him, a man does control how he plays them. His own world shattered beyond repair, Bruce was physically and psychologically unable to resist doing all in his power to impede the spread of the chaos which had claimed his own life. Indeed, apart from those efforts, Bruce Wayne has had no life.

His training was manic. He was driven to exceed the physical expertise of Olympic champions while pushing his intellectual capacities to the limit. There was virtually no social development, there was only his mission. This one-dimensional development accounts for Wayne's extremely limited success in interpersonal relationships; quite simply, he has never learned to interact with or trust other people as most well-adjusted people have. Wayne did not exist and the Batman was as-yet unnamed. Wayne would only resume his existence when the Batman took a name, and even then Wayne would be only a tool for the Batman.

Like Superman, Wayne's true identity is his costumed self. But unlike Superman, the civilian identity is not an effort to fit in with his surroundings, to be "just plain folks." For Wayne was ripped from his world when his parents died and he has been unable to return. Furthermore, he has made no effort to do so.

Wayne decided on a course of vigilance rather than be hampered by the rules and regulations which are often blamed for contributing to crime. To go a step further, I would say that Batman is not in the least concerned with the law. He seeks order. Order and justice. He is driven to remove what he sees as entropy crippling our society and ever-changing laws have no meaning for him.

The Batman is obsessed. Thoroughly. He is *not* irrational. Nor is he self-pitying or petulant, the way Mike Barr portrayed him in *BATO* #32. He is also not anti-social or hostile to "straights" like Superman as he appeared in *Heroes Against Hunger*. Rather, the Batman is *asocial*. He has always existed outside of our world. As Frank Miller says, Superman implies a benevolent world, while Batman implies a malevolent one. Batman and Superman need not dislike each other

because of this. Instead, they should complement each other. They can work well together, but only *infrequently* and only when there is a good story to be told. (See Alan Moore's *Superman Annual* from last year—great stuff!)

See "The Night of the Stalker" by Englehart and Amendola in *Detective* #439 for what I think is the quintessential Batman story. While an endless succession of such stories would be dull and contribute nothing toward character development, this is the story I hold up as representing Batman's true nature.

O'BRIAN TALLENT
Charleston, TN

The Amazing Amazon

There's been something botherin' me. Namely the publicity DC's "Tremendous Two" (Superman and Batman) have been receiving. They've been getting all this attention! I mean Batman made it to *Spin* and *Rolling Stone*, Superman made it to *The Today Show* (which I unfortunately missed) and Wonder Woman ma... what? What's going to happen to Wonder Woman?? You mean you don't know... OOOOOOHHHHH!!!! Excuse me!!! Hardly anything has been mentioned of comics leading lady!!!!

The only people who know anything about the Amazing Amazon becoming an Eighties Lady are those people who read the fanzines. Does DC have something up their collective sleeve or is that the problem, is DC now wearing sleeveless shirts?

Was everyone in such a mad frenzy when news about John Byrne taking over Superman, and Frank Miller taking over Batman, that George Perez & Greg Potter's Wonder Woman was overlooked?

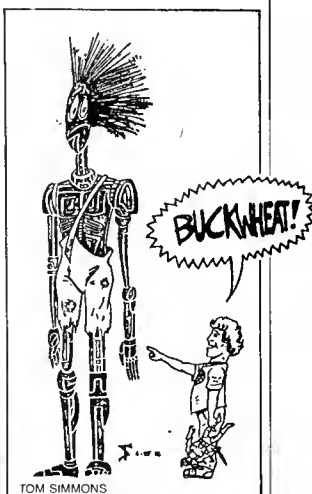
Somewhere I read that Wonder Woman was the only comic book (heroine?) to have her comic published nonstop for 44 years (Wonder Woman will be 45 this November on the eleventh). I think anyone who lives 44 years (as a comic) and still remains popular should have some publicity.

I realize this isn't as "big" a thing as John's Superman, after all he is reworking the most popular character around, but still...

If no one else notices... Happy Birthday, Wonder Woman!!!! After 45 years you've earned it!!!!

● The new Wonder Woman series will be covered featured on *Amazing Heroes* #106. —DS

GARY DUNAIER
Flushing, NY



Collecting Mets and Comics

Greetings and happy babosas from historic Flushing, New York, home of beautiful Shea Stadium and the amazing New York Mets, who as of today (June 19, 1986) are 44-18 and tops in the major leagues. Needless to say, I've been repeating at least half of managing editor David Smay's "Mets and Red Sox in October" mantra from the editorial section of *Amazing Heroes* #97 since March. Funny thing is, the 1986 Mets schedule has the boys from Flushing scheduled to play Boston at Fenway Park on September 4! See for yourself—an '86 Mets sked is enclosed with this very letter. [It's true. —DS]

Just bought *Amazing Heroes* #97 and if I have your permission I would like to say it's terrific. In most cases saying "Just bought the new issue" at the beginning of a letter is a cliché, but not here! Even as I write this letter the guy in the store bagging my copy, I haven't even read the darn thing yet! Actually, I told a fib I did read some of it, but if I don't write now I may never get the time to do it. The funny thing about the place I work for is that they actually expect me to work during working hours!

I want to comment on something else from the *Amazing Heroes* #97 editorial. "If you don't like *Cerebus* or *Flaming Carrot*, well... (managing editor throws his hands up in the air in a gesture of helpless resignation)." I like *Cerebus* and *Flaming Carrot*, but I don't buy them. Liking a comic is one thing—buying it another. I've tried both titles at least once, and I don't feel they're worth their

respective \$2.00 and \$1.70 cover prices. I'd buy them if they cost \$1.00, \$1.25 max. In case you're interested (I don't know, maybe you're taking a survey on the side), my top three fave raves are *American Splendor* and *Miracleman*. (The #3 slot is presently vacant as a result of the unfortunate cancellation of *Mazing Man*.)

Michael Sangiacomo's "Comic Collecting Then And Now" was a story I can identify with from both angles. Michael is older than me, but I'm pretty sure I'm older than the whiny kid who was grouching about not being able to get a third copy of *Dark Knight* (Dark Knight? Someone did a comic about third baseman Ray Knight? Oh, wait, that's the Batman thing. Sorry.)

I buy comics because I like to read them. I like the *Angel Love* comic—only its mini-series status prevents it from being a contender for the #3 position on my list of top three fave raves. Value? A dealer will be lucky to get a dollar for it ten years hence; that doesn't mean I can't enjoy it now. The money part of comic books doesn't elude me, however. I buy a hardcover *Overstreet* each year. I have two copies of *Fish Police* #1. I have two copies of the first printing of *Dark Knight* #1. I have about ten copies of *Man of Steel* #1. I have about 40 copies of *Miracleman* #1. Unfortunately, I made the mistake of paying \$15.00 for a copy of the 1980 edition of *New Teen Titans* #1 five years ago. Am I going to make money in the comic business? Not unless I get a job in the industry, either in the creative or retailing end. But the main thing is that I enjoy reading the books. The money aspect is fun to play with, but it's not the sum total of my involvement in the hobby. It was in the baseball card hobby that money was the be-all and end-all of my involvement. ~

I've learned from life experience that no matter how much money you spend on a hobby, you have to be interested in the hobby to enjoy it fully. In 1982 I got interested in baseball cards, but I was mainly interested in buying cards of rookies who would become superstars and take the values of their cards to the top with them. As a Mets fan, I followed the careers of Darryl Strawberry and Dwight Gooden from the beginning. Naturally, I wanted their baseball cards. Unfortunately, because of their talent, potential and popularity they cost more than I would have preferred to pay. Strawberry and Gooden's first Topps cards came out in "Update" sets that you could only get from baseball card dealers, not in bubblegum packs (direct-only baseball cards, as it were), and prices on some of these sets fluctuated every week. I promise I'm not exaggerating when I say that buying sets like these soon became a "you'd better buy it this very second because the price will shoot up 1,000 percent tomorrow" deal. The

hobby soon became more pressure than pleasure, and I stopped collecting cards. At least you can read a comic book; what can you do with a baseball card other than look at it?

Sorry this letter has dragged on, but for me writing it has been more fun than humans should be allowed to have. So has *Amazing Heroes*, matter of fact. It's improved vastly since the format change that took effect with #96. I'd like to see the year appear on the cover as part of the date ("June 15, 1986" instead of just "June 15")—give consideration to the fans of the future who will be buying the magazine as back issues. Apart from that, the only thing that disappoints is the news section. I'd like to see it more lengthy, informative and detailed—like "News-watch" in *The Comics Journal*. Since Fantagraphics publishes both amazing journals, it should be easy for you to emulate *The Comics Journal*'s news format.

I'm eagerly awaiting the arrival of Don Rosa's Information Center. I was a frequent questioner when the column appeared in *The Comic Reader* (come back *TCR*!), and I can't wait to send him more questions. (You don't mind if I practice for a minute do you? Let's see. Dear Don: Which is a better investment, *Dark Knight* #1 or *Man of Steel* #1? Dear Don: Which of the New Universe titles should I stock up on? Dear Don: How much is *G.I. Joe* #2 worth? Dear Don: How much is a sunset worth?)

So until Gary Groth gets a fan letter published in *Marvel Age* here's my mantra: Let's Go Mets! Let's Go Mets! Let's Go Mets!

R.R. POLLAK
Brooklyn, NY

Kid Comic Brokers

I enjoyed your short "Perspective" on comic collecting. People are realizing that comic art is rich with American Culture. My Mom, Dad and brothers learned English with the help of the Sunday comics pages. I learned to draw and appreciate art from them. For many years I have followed the careers of my favorite cartoonists, from strips to comic books. I appreciate their imagination and talent. They work very hard and give us a wonderful gift! It is sad to see kids becoming comic brokers, but maybe when they grow up they will attain what they missed earlier. I am in my early 30s and still have my childish enthusiasm about the fantastic world of the comics industry. It will keep me young for a long time.

P.S. It would be nice if you would spotlight Murphy Anderson! He's done wonderful work over the years on *Planet Comics*, *Buck Rogers*,

Hawkman, etc. His work is still going strong!

● This is as good a place as any for an editorial plea: Michael Sangiacomo, call home! Or at least drop me a line so I can have your address and send you your check for the "Perspective" piece in AH #97. While I'm at it, I also have a check for Pete Scott for AH #86. —DS

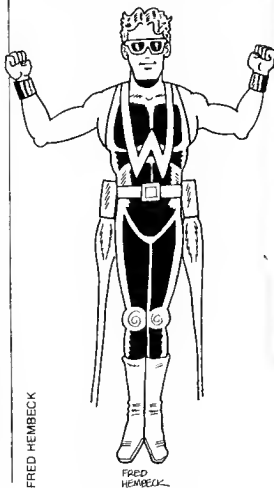
CARLETON BROWN
Springfield, MA

New Format Fan

Surprise, guys! This is not another missive of nasty name-calling, nor is it an attempt to analyze Marvel vs. DC, universe-changing series, or Alan Moore (well, maybe a little Alan Moore).

And that's only because the *Watchmen* issue of AH (#97) was the best one since... well, since the Byrne-Superman issue.

The fact that I had read the first two issues of the series before your article did not bother me. What your feature articles give is insight into the background and development of series and details readers would otherwise never enjoy. I wonder how many fans went back to *Watchmen* #1 and searched for the "Rorschach-sugar cube" sequence that Alan Moore explained? And while I don't wish to join the "Alan Moore is God" club, the article helps stress why the man has put comic writers back on the map. He's good. I predict low sales on *Watchmen*; not only



FRED HEMBECK

because the story is such a radical departure from "The Avengers League of Mutants," but if a 14-year old can make his way through the story, he will probably be frightened of this realistic version of his favorite comic characters.

The very design of *Watchmen* is innovative (for a mainstream publisher). The cover of #2 caused one kid in the comic shop to bemoan the absence of any costumed character on it, but purchase it because it would be valuable. Thus, I found Michael Sanguinico's "Perspective" article very agreeable. This feature is a welcome addition to the new lineup.

Speaking of which (the kid is great with the segues), I've given your new design the 2-issue trial and you've come up winners! Particularly enjoyable is "2-page Spread" with its capsule reviews and readers' poll. How about a few more reviews each issue and some info on how we can get a crack on that poll? (And you could open each issue up with the feature and have it spread on pg. oh, uh, never mind.)

As for "Comics in Review," a guest columnist each issue is a long-overdue idea. While R.A. Jones's opinions are well developed and often correct (to me), let's hear what someone else thinks. for a change!

The "Newline" new look is very attractive. I have a strong affection for the newspaper-style layout, having served as a college newspaper editor. This feature still remains the one to read first each issue.

"First Look." Ah, a feature unequalled by other fanzines, as we get a complete look at a potential new series to pick up without Mr. "Buy It Or Put It Down" sneering over our shoulders.

The other regular features have maintained their usual quality. I believe you guys are a shoo-in for the Favorite Publication About Comics category in this year's CBG awards.

The biggest surprise this issue? A little review way back on page 82. It's just totally unbelievable! T.M. Maple, the human post office, actually wrote a comic book!!! Excuse me while I call my comic shop owner to see if I can get a copy of *Captain Optimist* #1.

● *Actually, Watchmen is selling very well.* —DS

DAVID GALVIN
Alhadena, CA

Alpha Flop

The new *AH* format is terrific. Some of the best items are "Perspective," "2-Page Spread." (It'd be great if *AH* or *The Comics Journal* could have its own reader awards), "Newline,"

"Feature Article," "Comics in Review," and "Amazing Readers" (please, please no more *Crisis* letters). There were only two major drawbacks. The first was "The Ten Best." These articles were rather boring and the comics used were very old to many readers. It does have potential though. The second complaint doesn't apply to this issue, but rather upcoming issues, especially the one with the *Watchmen*, *Elektra*, and New Universe previews. These issues of *AH* will be coming out after the comic it is previewing has come out. Many people (including myself) use these previews to determine if they are going to buy it or not. By the way, I hope that your issue on the Marvel Productions is off the schedule for a long, long time.

Secondly, it is amazing how R.A. Jones likes *Alpha Flight*. Sure, I picked up the first three post-Byrne issues and then stopped collecting it. Bill Mantlo has made the book totally opposite from the way Byrne had it. Mantlo made the book more of a team than Byrne did. With Byrne's "non-team" approach, he took a very original and creative step by having *Alpha Flight* rarely together—this made the book so

much fun. Byrne threw away all the superhero-cliches but Mantlo took them out of the garbage. Notice the way he made Heather Hudson into a superhero, had the government take *Alpha Flight* back under its wing, etc. (R.A.: actually bought *Angel Love*!)

● *Nope. He got an advance xerox on that issue.* —DS

JEFF SALTARELLA
Hapeville, GA

"Woody's War," Part II

[Continued from last issue's letters column.]

However, the change of a book's title is not something that would be decided by the creative staff. This indicated that other levels of the company were getting involved in the book. When Wood left, the change of direction—somewhat abruptly handled—shows at least that a change was *desired*. No other Gold Key title went through the



GREG WILCOX



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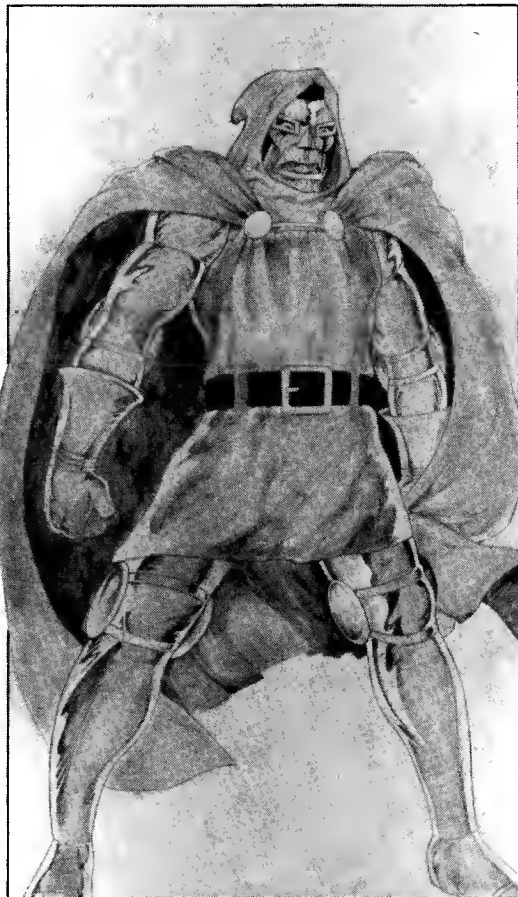
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DOUGLAS SPAULDING

changes seen in *Total War/Mars Patrol*, so I can easily believe Evanier's description of the Western operation.

Pressing the point, Wood participated in a SF panel at the 1972 EC convention in which writing and creating for Gold Key (and others) was mentioned. Transcripts of this panel were preserved in *Squa Tront* #8. Now, Wood's other Gold Key work, again according to the *Wood Treasury*, consisted of three books besides *Mars*. Evanier mentioned the movie ad to *Fantastic Voyage*; the others were shorts in *Boris Karloff* and *Ripley's*, one each. By deduction, *Mars* was the only feature he did there that could have so involved him.

It also fits well into the progression Wood's career was taking back then.

Again, Bhob Stewart's article in *Comics Journal* #70 was an in-depth look at Wood's shop in these years—first hand! He was the first artist at Marvel to get scripting credit (though Kirby stepped forward to claim his in recent years) and was aiming at *Witzend*, his own ground-breaking magazine. *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents*...well, I'll save them for later.

I used the general term, "write" rather than create or script, since I knew Wood liked to work with partners. And I used it, even though Dan Adkins remembered Wood only being paid for doing the artwork on the book. Wood, like Kirby or Ditko, was likely to contribute more—like, perhaps, the outdated Army-style slang used by the Navy-educated Marines, or the para-

troop attacks instead of '60s heliborne operations. The deeper changes in *Mars* after Wood left also point to Wood's doing more than just pictures.

Evanier implied that Wood's association with Gold Key continued for quite a while after *Mars*. However, only the *Fantastic Voyage* adaptation was released later—about one year after *Mars* #3. Since the film came out in 1966—the year I picked for Wood's departure—and the book in Feb. '67, the assessment seems perfectly accurate. The *Wood Treasury* and *Overstreet* do not reflect any longer of a Wood/Western union that I did.

Both critics noted what I consider the only truly drastic error in my article: I attributed Mike Roy's art to Mike Royer. The two artists' work is quite completely dissimilar, and I just plain blew the ID. However, I'm not quite sure that this mistake is equivalent to misidentifying U.S. presidents, since we generally credit our presidents.

Both my critics could have found lots more, they say, but the last "error" pointed out in the article dealt with Wood's relationship with Tower. Evanier mentioned that many Tower regulars didn't deal with Wood at all, and that his Art Director position in early issues was exaggerated. If I may quote Dan Adkins, who worked on the books, from the *Wood Treasury*, when he was asked "Who Created the T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents?": Wood. He was the Editor who controlled the whole show. Larry Ivie scripted the first issue of *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents*, but it was all Woody's idea... Adkins's is the first-hand account, and I'm inclined to believe him.

Obviously, I still don't consider my article "woefully lacking in facts" or "entirely untrue," despite the heartfelt criticisms of two very fine and respected men. If I may quote Polybius, "[Persons] knowing accurately every portion of it [my history] from personal experience...will not be struck so much by the accuracy of the description, as annoyed by its omissions; nor will they believe that the historian has purposely omitted unimportant distinctions, but will attribute his silence...to ignorance." The object of the offending passages was to give some general background to *Mars*—not vice-versa. I tried to be compact and general because I didn't think it was in the scope of the article to go deeply into behind-the-scenes activity. In fact, this rebuttal itself is more than a third as long as the article in question.

In retrospect, I do wish "Wood's War" had been better. I hadn't intended to anger anyone with it—just to give some exposure to an often overlooked Woodwork (eulogies in *Comics Journal* #69, *Heavy Metal* #59, and *Epic* #11 did not even mention it.) I thought it deserved to be remembered.

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